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THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR IN INDIA'S PERFORMING ARTS

Ananda K Coomaraswamy Centenary Essays

Editor: Prof. V Subramaniam

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Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy was the greatest expositor of Indian Art, particularly to the West and one of the leading art historians of the world, This book of essays on the performing arts is being brought out in connection with his centenary.

It examines critically the Kalayogi's thesis that art is religion and religion is art—from several angles in regard to Indian classical dance and music. It suggests a different thesis based on frequent interaction of the secular and the sacred. It includes contributions from practicing dancers and musicians as well academic analysts of the arts. It is edited by Professor V. Subramaniam, himself a classical composer of dance drama as well as a sociologist of the arts. It includes some unusual photographs of Coomaraswamy.

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The Sacred and the Secular in India's Performing Arts--

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Centenary Essays

आम्नाय-ग्रन्थालय,
भरतनिधि, करौंदी
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Edited by Prof. V. Subramaniam

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A NOTE ON OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Prof. V. Subramaniam, the editor is Professor of Political Science at Carleton University, Ottawa and a classical composer of acknowledged merit. In the last few years, he has done considerable work on cultural sociology and history of which his recent book *Cultural Integration in India* (Ashish Publishing House) is a good example. For more background information see the dust jacket.

Prof. V.K. Chari, is a Professor of English Literature at Carleton University and has done much work on Sanskrit poetics and aesthetics. He is also an accomplished Kathakali dancer.

Anne-Marie Gaston (Anjali) recently completed her B. Phil. Thesis at Oxford—from which the present chapter is taken. She is a professional Bharata Natyam and Odissi dancer of repute with considerable knowledge of Kuchipudi and Kathakali.

Dr. Martha Ashton is a cultural anthropologist who has worked in Karnataka on folk culture. She is also an accomplished Yakshagana dancer.

Dr. Balasaraswati is the doyen of Bharata Natyam dancers and one who played an important part in the revival of this ancient art. She is the grand daughter of the legendary genius of the Veena, Dhanammal and has taught in Universities in India and the West.

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Dr. K. Shivram Karanth, Like a many-splendoured god from a Yakshagana play Shivram Karanth towers over the world of Kannada letters and art. This renowned novelist, play-wright, educationist and, above all, the man who revived the ancient art of Yakshagana Bayalata was recently honoured with the prestigious Jnanpith Award.

His name is synonymous with Yakshagana, the centuries-old folk theatre of Karnataka. But almost all his innovations, such as doing away with the dialogue, have been widely questioned.

He is living in Suhasa, Saligrama P.O., Udipi Taluk, South Kanara, Karnataka State-576225.

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was conceived as a special and unusual tribute to the memory of the great Kala Yogi Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Several books published both soon after his death and during his centenary year of 1977 bring out several aspects of his greatness and contributions. This book attempts to be different in concentrating a substantial amount of criticism on the major thesis and theme of his mature years, namely, the close relation or the identity of art and religion. Most of my fellow contributors agree with me that this was the best way of honouring a great man whose impact was sufficiently strong as to provoke admiration as well as analysis.

Our concentration on the performing arts is easily explained. This was the area in which Coomaraswamy's thesis can be challenged substantially. Moreover, from a practical point of view, I could assemble more original and critical contributions on this area than on the visual and plastic arts, on which there is an increasing volume of writing much of which is highly technical. Secondly, as a musical composer of classical dance dramas, I feel at home in this area as a practitioner. I may add also somewhat regretfully that the Kalayogi's weakest point was his poor knowledge of Indian classical music.

It was both fortunate and unfortunate that this book was assembled without any of us reading the two recent volumes of *From Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers*, edited by Roger Lipsey and published by the Princeton University Press in 1977-78. In the first place, the Princeton volumes were being prepared just about the time I was assembling

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contributions for this book. I got to know about them and met Prof. Lipsey himself at a conference in honour of Coomaraswamy at the University of Lancaster in July 1977. I was also fortunate in getting a general idea of this collection of papers from the galley proofs of Lipsey's excellent "Introduction". It might have been useful for most of the contributors to have read these papers of the Kalayogi which are otherwise difficult of access. But in another sense I am glad that we worked independently and were not acquainted in detail with this work. It may have induced some of us to react to Coomaraswamy's work in some detail, instead of acting on our own initiative as we have done, about the general approach of the Kalayogi. Secondly, though he has elaborated his thesis thoroughly in these later papers, his general views on the identity of art and religion, particularly of Hindu art and religion are sufficiently well-known from his earlier writings to form our point of departure.

The plan followed in this book is straight and simple. There are two parts, the first part being devoted to a direct analysis and criticism of Coomaraswamy's thesis with a considered effort to set the balance right in regard to the performing arts. I have myself discussed in Chapters 1 2 and 3 the importance of the secular elements in Indian music and dance from a socio-historical point of view and in addition I have tried to set his approach in the context of his times and his own personal life in a separate note following this Introduction. Others examine some special aspect of the secular element. Prof. Chari thus analyses the shortcomings of the religious approach in the light of traditional classical writings on Aesthetics in Sanskrit. Mrs. Anne Marie-Gaston (Anjali) traces the history of the Devadasis and their contribution, a topic carefully neglected by many writers. Dr. Martha Ashton, as a practising dancer of Yakshagana, examines the practical interweaving of the secular and religious elements therein.

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The second part includes essays published in the Journal of the National Centre for the performing arts in a different context and republished here with due permission. These essays were selected mainly to illustrate two points. In the first place, practitioners and theoreticians of Hindustani classical music are normally less obsessed or even totally unconcerned with the religious or Bhakti elements, as is shown by articles on the Ghazal and Thumri. The other articles on Bharatanatyam, Kootiyattam and Yakshagana were included to show how people deeply involved in these arts, bring in the religious element but not with the same obsession as Coomaraswamy does.

It may be useful to include a brief personal note on how I came to be interested in this approach and chose this theme for a Coomaraswamy centenary tribute. I have explained in some detail in my book of five Sanskrit dance dramas, *i.e.*, *Panchakanya Tarangini*, how I started as a composer of dance dramas in classical music on Buddhist themes. In the context of my creative work on Buddha I had to answer the question to myself as to why he was neglected almost totally in the performing arts for centuries, even while he was the prime mover and the central figure of the glorious efflorescence of Indian sculpture. This led me naturally to investigate the socio-historical context in which the Bhakti Movement brought art and religion closer against the backdrop of a gradual weakening of the political realm. Ultimately the Hindu intellectuals developed a method of cultural integration to make up for the failure of political imperial integration. All these developments have been discussed at some length in my two other books namely (*a*) *Cultural Integration in India : A Socio-Historical Analysis* (Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978), and (*b*) *The Socio-Historical Context of Indian Administration and Politics* (Hindustan Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1981). It became clear to me in the course of my creative and analytical activities that a critical discussion of Coomaraswamy's somewhat theological approach to art

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was the best tribute I and my colleagues can pay to the memory of the Kalayogi. I think there is little need for any of the contributors in the first part to make clear their deep respect for the enormous and pioneering contributions of Coomaraswamy. His place in Indian Art-History is secure enough and in World Art-History he is recognized as the man who added several new dimensions to art history and art criticism.

I would also like to use this occasion to express my gratitude and appreciation to a number of people who inspired me in this regard over the years. The most direct inspiration came from Mr. K. Navarathnam of Jaffna, himself one of the leading disciples of Coomaraswamy. He was himself an art historian and critic in his own right, deeply versed in Tamil classical literature. I note with regret that his two Tamil works on Indian art, are still not available in English. His personal regard for Coomaraswamy bordered on veneration, and my effort to understand Coomaraswamy through his well-known published works began through him. Navarathnam appreciated me mainly for my ruthless criticisms of his draft articles as he felt that thereby he was fully armed against any further criticism. He encouraged me and stood by me when I presented a portrait of Coomaraswamy to the Jaffna Municipal Corporation and arranged for a well-publicised function for its opening in 1954. My contact with the other well-known Coomaraswamy-worshipper Mr. Dorairajalingam of Malaysia was mainly through correspondence. I was also flattered to find that my analytical note on Coomaraswamy, particularly of his discussion of the dancing Siva attracted sufficient attention from English students of Indian art and that Dr. Roger De La May quoted it during his Coomaraswamy memorial lecture in 1953.

My other mentors, mainly in the field of Indian classical literature and Hindu Philosophy, were many and varied and I will refer to only some of them. My maternal grand-

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mother was my first teacher in this regard who arranged for my instruction in Sanskrit from a very old tutor. The influence of my own birth-place, Tuticorn, as a whole, was very strong as it was the headquarters for a long while of the Saiva Siddantha Sabha and the venue of their annual conferences. In fact, Tuticorn in the 1930s was the hub of all types of contradictory activities. I would also like to mention Prof. A. Sreenivasa Raghavan, whose deep scholarship in Tamil literature was aided by his thorough grounding in English literature which he taught.

There are many others who in one way or the other, had shaped my views on Indian and Western art and some whose influence has been too subtle for me even to identify.

This volume is essentially exploratory. It would have been a little easier to collect a number of tributes to Coomaraswamy or several technically excellent analyses of some aspects of his work. It might have been, on the other hand, quite easy to take a totally anti-religious, rigidly Marxist point of view and shower criticism on Coomaraswamy's approach from that vantage point. This work does not attempt to do that as such though many of the contributors including myself have been influenced to some extent by Marxist writings. But Marxists themselves claim that much of Marxist writing on art is idolatrous, unimaginative and misleading in trying to find an obvious economic base for every type of art expression and an obvious pre-structured relation between the economy and the arts. What we have done here is to try to balance Coomaraswamy's over-enthusiastic theological approach through a reasonably documented presentation of the secular side of the performing arts.

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2. Dr. Premlata Sharma	"The History and Origin of the *Thumri*"	II	2
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5. Dr. K. Kunjunne Raja	"*Kootiyattam*"	III	2
6. Dr. K. Shivram Karanth	"The *Yakshagana* of Karnataka"	III	3

etc.

The special pictures of Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy used on the cover and inside were loaned kindly by Dr. Roger Liosey, editor of **The Collected Papers of Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy,** Princeton University Press and Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy, son of the Kalayogi.

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THE KALAYOGI, ART AND RELIGION

Coomaraswamy has explained at some length in his *Dance of Siva and Other Essays* and his famous essay on Eckhart, his basic ideas on the closeness of religion and art. In his later and more scholarly essays edited by Roger Lipsey under the title *From Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers*, he has explained the same with greater detail and sophistication. Those interested in Coomaraswamy's own "theological" view of art as such need to study these sources. The purpose of this brief note is to analyse socio-psychologically the reasons for the Kalayogi's obsession with this theme.

His personal life was rather smooth on the surface as pointed out by Roger Lipsey, from whose excellent "Introduction" to the Princeton Volumes, I am drawing the material for the next two paragraphs. Born to a distinguished Ceylonese aristocrat, Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy and his English wife, he lost his father when he was barely two years old and was brought up by his mother in England. The family was very well off and this seems to have helped Coomaraswamy not only to build up a valuable art collection but also to go through life with unusual calm. He went through three divorces in his life without any seeming impact on his thought and work and he did not settle down to a regular position till he was forty. Starting with a honours degree in Geology, he returned to his birth-country Ceylon to research on its minerological deposits and was appointed as the first Director of the Minerological Survey of Ceylon in his early twenties. His travels in the country convinced him of the disintegrating effects of Westernisation on the life of the Ceylonese. He published a book on the pre-colonial crafts of Ceylon in 1980 under the title *Medieval Sinhalese Art*. By this time, he had already lost interest in minerology and had became a full fledged art critic and historian. From 1910-1914 he travelled extensively

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in India and by 1916 he had formed some of his basic views on Indian Art.

We can identify three formative stages in his intellectual life. In the first stage, he changed over from a mineralogist into an art connoisseur and art critic through his extensive study of Sinhalese art. This stage was completed when he spent the first few years of this century in Calcutta promoting the Swadeshi movement with Rabindranath Tagore, providing the movement with an intellectual and romantic base. He had thus matured from being a mere rebel against mass production (in the footsteps of William Morris) into something more rounded and refined, a sponsor of Indian music, crafts and life-style for its own sake. The next stage lasted from then on upto the late nineteen twenties. During this period Coomaraswamy employed his substantial personal fortune in making a collection of Indian art objects and trying to promote the idea of a national museum of Indian art. He failed to get support either in India or in Britain where his conscientious objection to the First World War made life somewhat less than pleasant. Artistically, however, he had changed from an advocate into a historian of great discrimination. His book *Rajput Painting* published in 1916 distinguished clearly between Rajput and Moghul painting and emphasised the variety, profoundity and continuity of Hindu art. In 1917 he found a permanent base in the United States as the keeper of Indian and Mohammadan Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and his vast collection of paintings, bronzes and textiles was purchased by its leading patron Denman W. Rose. More importantly, during the second part of this long stage, Coomaraswamy became more deeply interested in Hindu philosophy, theology and iconography. Already he had published two books namely: *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists and Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, foreshadowing his more deeply religious writings of later years. But it was Rene Guenon's study of the Vedanta which turned Coomaraswamy more clearly in the direction of philosophy

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and theology. We find the first fruits of this transformation in his book *Dance of Siva* (1918) which in fact became more famous than his earlier and later works. Already we see Coomaraswamy totally concerned with interpreting Nataraja through Saivite Agamas and Saiva Siddantha works in Tamil. The third stage completed this transformation. During the period 1929-32, Coomaraswamy immersed himself in a deeper study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and several other religious traditions. As a result, he seems to have become fully convinced of his final declaration of faith that art is religion and religion is art. During the long mature and extremely productive period from 1932-1947, he wrote a large number of essays and articles, elaborating, explaining and establishing this view. Fortunately these essays are now collected and published in two volumes by Roger Lipsey. As he points out, Coomaraswamy tended to become more theological and conceptual during this period and he constructed what can be described as a new world of Ideas regarding art. Coomaraswamy himself claimed that he was expounding the traditional theory of art, unfortunately overlaid with the arrogant theories of secular art in the West. He became more of a prophet, crying in a sort of secularistic wilderness for a re-discovery of the religious symbolism and the religious basis of art.

While Lipsey has explained the intellectual Odyssey of Coomaraswamy from craft appreciation to theological and philosophical understanding of art and while Coomaraswamy himself must be read thoroughly for a full rationalisation of his own view point, our task in this note is first to understand this transformation in its proper socio-historical context and secondly to evaluate his impact on the West and the East. We may start by noting in the first place, that Coomaraswamy was not unique in asserting the primacy of religious and philosophical understanding of things Indian, during the first half of this century. I have discussed in detail in Appendix I of my book *Cultural Integration in India : A Socio-Historical Analysis*, how the three decades

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from 1890 to 1920 marked a glorious period of Hindu radicalist revivalism. It was partly a discriminating reaction of the Indian derivative middle class against its earlier counter-productive imitation of the West. Secondly, it was also a practical way of utilising the only continuous tradition in India namely the religio-cultural tradition to resuscitate and revitalise the political and social realms. There were several sponsors of this movement reviving different aspects of it; Dayananda Saraswati, advocating a return to primitive Rigvedic vigour and vitality, Vivekananda, Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi attempting the recreation of vital Western values through Hindu scriptures, and Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo, propounding a universalism with unchallenged primacy for the Hindu religio-cultural tradition. To say that Coomaraswamy followed directly any of them would be absurd. But to assume that he was totally unaffected by the radicalist revivalism of these three decades, is to attribute total intellectual isolation to him. He enriched this revivalist radicalism during the Swadeshi Movement and again through his aristocratically aggressive assertions of the greatness of Indian art in the teeth of not only ignorant imperial arrogance, but even against Western secular scholars. While his mental transformation was a result of his own reading, understanding and thinking, one can appreciate it much better in the total socio-historical context of these three crucial decades.

Coomaraswamy's enthusiasm was not so much the zeal of the convert because he was never really deprived of access to the Hindu religio-cultural heritage. It was more comparable to the famous example used by Sri Ramanuja about the young lost prince, educated in the forest by a learned Brahmin of character who was then restored to his father and kingdom. While Max Mueller steeped himself in the Vedas, but was afraid to expose himself to the decadence and disintegration in modern India, Coomaraswamy bravely set himself up as a true Indian on Indian soil, turned a blind eye to its miseries and social problems and only the glory and greatness that survived in the plastic and performing arts.

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Thirdly, he was attracted by the anti-secularistic and anti-industrial and pro-Vedantic stand of western intellectuals such as Romain Rolland and Rene Guenon and from there he started his pilgrimage to the artistic theories of medieval christianity. Again, one can compare him with Mahatma Gandhi's deriving inspiration from Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. However, when all these three elements in the socio-historical context have been taken into account, much remains that can only be explained by Coomaraswamy's own intellectual sincerity and his capacity for an endless voyage of self-discovery.

Another obvious point needs to be stressed here which has been forgotten in general discussions of Indian and Western art. The religious nature and basis of Indian art take on significance only in contrast to the secular basis of the post-18th century Western art. If all art were either religious or secular, there would be no need to distinguish Indian art from the Western. Coomaraswamy himself considered the deviation of Western art from its medieval Christian moorings as a mad drive into a *cul-de-sac*. He ignored the whole phenomenon of the economic transformation of Europe through commercialism and industrial capitalism triggered off by the ethical basis of Protestantism. A thorough analysis of the secularisation of art in the West and the continued religious basis of art in India cannot be made without going into the socio-economic history of this period in India, West and China with or without Marxist weapons. Coomaraswamy might have considered that as useless or misleading but this task needs to be attempted competently to understand and analyse the contrasting bases of traditional Hindu and modern Western art.

Finally we must attempt a very quick estimate of Coomaraswamy's influence in independent India and in the world as a whole. It is a mixed tale of success as well as failure often in unexpected areas and ways. Even his obvious success in popularising the icon of dancing Siva is a

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mixture of achievement and vulgarization. The Nataraja image itself, almost unknown outside South India round the turn of this century, is now found in all the posh lounges of Indo-Philic western homes, offices and universities all over the world and practically in every Western museum either as an original or in a good replica. The dramatic story of the recent theft of the Sivapuram Nataraja, its detection by a British art critic, its valuation at over 4 million dollars, the well publicised legal action and its impending restoration to India have all highlighted the glory of the Nataraja image beyond all doubt. We may also add that through a study of this icon and that of Sivakama Sundari, the consort of Nataraja, Western artists and art critics have come to appreciate the basic principles and standards of Indian sculpture more than through any other means. On the other hand, we cannot also forget the story of vulgarisation. The icon has become a prestige symbol, regardless of the quality of the casting and as a result, these icons are made in every State of India and with all sorts of alloys and even the Tibetan refugees in Janpath, Delhi, do a roaring trade with ugly icons of the dancing lord.

In regard to his major thesis, about the identity of art and religion, the developments are quite similar. The thesis, in a diluted sense has found fairly wide acceptance. Westerners have come to associate Indian art with religion more than Indians do themselves. This, however, has its own credit and debit side. On the credit side one can put down a minority of Western scholars and students of Indian art who assign to Coomaraswamy a place higher than that of Freud and Croce. They discount the exaggeration involved in Coomaraswamy's assertion of total identity of art with religion, but understand the profound significance of art in terms of the spiritual values of the artist and his community and the attendant symbolism and stylisation. Indeed some of the best interpretations of Indian sculpture both in India and abroad have come from such devoted Western scholars. More importantly, Coomaraswamy guided Western art stu-

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dents to appreciate the spiritual significance not only of medieval Christian art but of religious art every where. The agony and the ecstacy of Henry Moore in undertaking and fulfilling his commission for a new cathedral in Coventry can be understood only in terms of the new consciousness produced by Coomaraswamy's work. Few educators in art can claim such a deep impact, as was proved by the several conferences held in Western universities in 1977 to celebrate his centenary.

But the vulgarisations resulting from his assertion are equally widespread. In India itself, art and religion are associated in the majority of Indian homes through millions of lithographed pictures of Gods and Godesses produced for calendars or otherwise. The process was inaugurated by the easy production of lithographs from Ravi Varma's paintings of Gods and Godesses which Coomaraswamy somewhat unfairly despised. But what followed in the wake of Ravi Varma was much worse. The thousands of lithographs produced by calendar artists have certainly nothing to do with the Indian tradition of stylisation and symbolism. The pictures of Krishna in the art paper editions of *Bhagavata Purana* distributed by the Hare Krishna movement belong to the same category.

It is, of course, unfair to put all the blame on Coomaraswamy for this spate of vulgarisation. It is the inevitable result of certain other processes in which he played no part. The running away of Western youths and adults from the rat race and the attendant problems of Western industrial society is a part of all developed societies. Indian spirituality was made available to the West exactly about the same time when this process was beginning while native Christian spirituality was suspect as an instrument of the promoters of the rat race itself. But the substantial number of Westerners who take to varieties of Indian spirituality for solace are not the most artistically minded and vulgarised lithographs may serve the same function for them which the icon served for the cultivated artistic devotee for his Dhyana.

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In India itself apart from religious lithographs, serious painting has turned to less religious subjects. Coomaraswamy gave some qualified praise to the Bengali School of Nandalal Bose and Abanindranath Tagore for their Indian technique, seriousness and subdued symbolism. This school has been overtaken by a number of other modes in painting. There are those who go to the mural art of our temples or the tribals for inspiration and there are many more who have turned to Western Impressionism, even when they paint Indian village scenes, funerals, marriages and the inevitable gossips near the village well. If any one has inspired this movement towards a study of ordinary Indian life, it is not Coomaraswamy but Amritha Shergill, whose work, the former did not take much note of.

All these comments do not detract from Coomaraswamy's basic achievement as the first and perhaps the greatest missionary of Indian art both for India and the West. By any standards, his success was astounding in spite of some vulgarisation. It is fortunate that he did it at the most propitious time well before Western interest developed in African art on the one hand and Chinese and Japanese art on the other. The African and the Far Eastern styles of art hold a basic appeal to the West as a whole through their basic secularism and their straight appeal to a pleasure-seeking consciousness. Coomaraswamy laid the basis of appreciation of Indian art in good time and left a substantial generation of disciples and admirers who could hold the fort against other tendencies.

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CHAPTER I

THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR : SYMBIOSIS AND SYNTHESIS

—Prof. V. Subramaniam

The idea that Indian music and dance are firmly based on Hindu religion is well rooted among Western as well as Indian connoisseurs of music and dance, quite independently of Coomaraswamy's scholarly arguments. Most Westerners who sit by my side at an Indian music or dance performance automatically ask me for the meaning of some song or gesture and the question usually implies which God or which Puranic story, it is related to. In the case of Indians, the understanding of a dance performance, it is assumed, requires knowledge of several Puranic stories and most Indian connoisseurs would ask rhetorically where would our arts be without Bhakti.

This assumption of a close relation between the arts and Bhakti is easily understood in terms of visible symbols and well-known stories. Lord Siva is the Lord of Dance and Coomaraswamy's exegesis of the Ananda Thandava pose is well-known in all art circles and the icon is now displayed in a corner on the stage in practically all Bharatanatyam performances. Indeed in South Indian iconography Siva is

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not only the Lord of Dance but of music as well as Veenadhara Dakshinamurthy. Vaishnavites have Lord Krishna playing the flute (Venugopala) as the God of music. Even in regard to dance, Krishna's dance on the head of the Kaliya as Kaliya-Mardhana is stated to be the beginning of the dance tradition. Indeed the Kathak School acknowledges this as the origin of dance and its rythm syllables are based upon the sound which Krishna's foot produced on the head of Kaliya. We can go further and say that every instrument is associated with some God or Goddess and every form of music and every aspect of dance is referred to as originating from some act of the Gods. There is no need to elaborate this further to pile up a long list of Puranic references. A few will do to illustrate the point. Thus Saraswati is associated with the Veena as is Narada and Hanuman is associated with a particular style of music as Narada is associated with the rival style. Practically every God is connected with some form of dance as well and the most unlikely God Ganesha has also been linked in sculpture with dance as Natana Ganapati. Moreover music and classical dance have been recognised for several centuries as ways of attaining Mokhsa and both Siva and Vishnu are reputed to have a special warm corner in their hearts for musicians. Siva, according to the Tamil Thiruvilaiyadal Purana rescued a musician-devotee of his by taking the guise of a wood-cutter and shamed a rival musician to run away by his virtuosity. Vishnu is reputed as declaring in the following words, "I do not live in Vaikunta, nor in the hearts of yogis, nor in the sun ; where my Bhaktas sing, there I stand."

I have given enough obvious references to show that there is a good base for the contemporary view of Indian and Western connoisseurs who associate music and dance closely with religion. I argue in the following paragraphs that this association was a result of the evolution of the Bhakti movement from the sixth century onwards and the special context of that evolution. My approach may be summed up thus :

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Secular music in praise of kings, chieftains and patrons was the dominant influence in the centuries before the sixth, while religious music occupied a fairly important but rather secondary place. During this period of secular dominance in the performing arts, the political realm in India was quite strong and successive efforts were made to integrate India politically through imperial conquest. By the sixth century, however, these efforts had exhausted themselves and the arena was clear for attempts at cultural rather than political integration. The Bhakti Movement of the South was the first and probably the most important factor in this and brought together religion and art closer and closer. But this relation was sustained in South India by a partial secularization of religion through equating the temple with a palace and the temple deity with a king. This association was strengthened during the period of Muslim rule.

Let us elaborate this thesis in some detail.

There is some evidence to show that music and dance were more secular than religious both in North and South India before the Bhakti Movement. The religious chanting of Samaveda has often been identified as the origin of music in North India. But Agnihothram Ramanuja Tatacharya has shown clearly in an article, "Vedam Potrum Geetham" (in *Kalki Deepavali Malar*, November, 1970) that regular music existed independently of, and simultaneously with, Samagana. Thus the Vedas distinguish clearly between Samagana and regular gana. They also refer to Gathas which are to be sung and to mantras which have to be chanted. Instrumental music is also clearly distinguished from vocal and orchestral music. The Vedas also refer to a multitude of instruments and the close relation between women and music. Professional and amateur musicians are also distinguished and several types of songs appropriate to

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sacrificial purposes on the one hand and weddings and social occasions are described. It is clear on the whole that this music which existed independently of Samagana was secular, was used for the pleasure of kings, chieftains, performers of sacrifices and those who took part in functions like marriage. During the later Puranic and Kavya periods there are more references to the secular nature of music. Most of the musical occasions referred to in Kalidasa's *Meghadhutam*, his description of Himavan's capital in *Kumara Sambhavam* and references in the plays of Bhasa indicate that music was more associated with secular romanticism. One also gets the impression of music being associated with idle rich lovers. The pleasure houses which supplied music to the Nagarika described in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* were ultra-secular. Budhist Nikayas also associate music with palaces, the mansions of the rich and the pleasure-houses of courtesans.

The situation in the South was even more obviously secular. This was so because Tamil society itself of the reputed Sangam period and post-Sangam period was secular, outward-looking, somewhat extravert and uninhibited, as shown by Sangam literature itself. Indeed, it was probably the most non-religious literature anywhere in the world at any time till the modern period. Sangam poetry was divided into two classes, namely, *Aham* or *Ahattinai* singing about the various aspects of the love relation between man and woman and *Puram* devoted to praising the virtues of heroism and generosity of kings, chieftains and sometimes ordinary people. The dominant class of poetry was *Aham* and it bore the minimal reference to religion. In *Puram*, one can isolate only two works which are distinctly based on piety, namely, *Murugatruppadai* and *Paripadal*. There were no prayer songs in Sangam works and it is now known that they were added much later. The late Dr. M. Varadarajan pointed out in a popular annual several instances where a reference to God was through glorifying the king and seeking God's blessings on him. Some other scholars have

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tried to contest his point of view which, however, is well sustained, because the instances produced by the rival scholars are far too few to affect his main thesis.

Music and dance were very popular in this secular society and there was a class of singers or minstrels who generally lived on the generosity of munificent chieftains or kings referred to as *Vallals*, and a special genre of *Puram* poetry was evolved by them called *Atruppadai*. In this genre a lucky minstrel who had received gifts from a chieftain showed the way to his castle to another less lucky minstrel. The occasion was used by the poet not only to sing about the great qualities of the chieftain but also describe the beauties of nature on the way to his castle and even the virtues of the inhabitants of that territory. Thus what music there was in Tamil country during the Sangam period, was essentially secular, infact, more secular than it was in North India.

The position in regard to dance is less clear. Dances are certainly referred to in Sangam literature without references to Gods. But early post-Sangam literature contains references both to secular as well as religious dancing. Thus *Manimekhalai* a Buddhist epic refers to dance not only as secular but as a sensuous art and essentially anti-Buddhist. In *Silappadikaram*, however, various dances are attributed to various Gods ; *Kodukotty* to Siva, *Pandarangam* to Vishnu and *Pedi* to Manmatha. About the same period, Karaikkal Ammaiyar had already made dance a totally divine occupation in her praise of dancing Siva in her *Moothathirupadigam*.

The really big transformation took shape, however, in the centuries between the sixth and ninth, when the great Tamil devotional movement took shape and the Saivite devotees called Nayanars and the Vaishnavite devotees called Alwars poured out their hearts in musical devotional

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poetry. That crucial period transformed the whole approach to the performing arts from secular to a deeply devotional one and intensified the already religious nature of the visual and plastic arts, namely sculpture and architecture. At the same time in making this historical and fundamental transformation certain basic concessions had to be made to secular society and secular concepts. The result was that on the surface the transformed arts appeared totally religious and devotional, whereas on closer examination they accommodated practically all the earlier secular elements. That is why I call this relation partly a symbiosis and partly a synthesis. I have traced in detail the socio-historical context of Bhakti in my book *Cultural Integration in India : A Socio-Historical Analysis* (Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978). A brief summary of that is given in the following paragraphs to help understand the nature of this symbiotic transformation.

The major driving force of this transformation was the general decline of the political realm in India which became clear by the sixth and seventh centuries. In North India, efforts at unifying large parts of India through imperial conquests had only short-lived success. The Mauryan and Gupta empires though successful in their own way, did not establish a permanent continuing empire as the Chinese did. Harsha's effort in the seventh century was more a swansong than a resuscitation. In South India there was a less concentrated effort to unify and two empires have always tried to hold the balance. A partial destruction of the Tamil way of life by the Kalabras seems to indicate a decline of political values in Tamil country too. There was a general shift of emphasis in the minds of the intellectuals and the cultural elite from political to the cultural and religious realms. This shift, however, did not take place under conditions similar to the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity. The political realm was secure enough to provide some peace and even prosperity, as it had provided the conditions for cultural contact and exchange in its earlier

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period of glory. I am inclined to attribute the absorption of some secular elements into religion and art to this ambivalent condition, of partial decline without disintegration.

Secondly, Bhakti derived practically all its foundation and inspiration from two secular elements in Tamil Sangam literature namely, the *Ahattinai* type of romantic identification and the *Atruppadai* tradition of glorifying the munificent chieftains. Aham poetry consisted of several anthologies of individual poems by leading poets and all these poems explored the love relationship of man and woman within the ambit of some basic literary rules. The first of these rules was the depersonalisation of the love experience described in the poem by not mentioning the names of the lovers. Such depersonalisation, it was believed, would transfer the experience to the reader and the listeners thoroughly. Secondly, suggestive descriptions of nature were used as a back-drop to evoke a mood of empathy. Thus rain clouds and jasmine flowers signify the pangs of separation. As time went on, there emerged an elaborate set of conventions relating every major or minor mode of love experience to some particular type of landscape and some time of the day, some flowers and some animals. These two basic rules regarding depersonalisation and nature-representation helped to universalise the experience. In particular, the depersonalised poem was always spoken in the first person by the lover or beloved or the lady's mother or girl-friend. This helped the reader to identify with the experience in the first person. Altogether all these three conventions helped Bhakti poets particularly, Nammalvar and Tirumangai to take over this form of poetry to sing about their extremely intimate relations with the Lord as lover. Such take over was facilitated when genuine *Aham* romantic poetry was declining for various reasons such as changed political conditions and particularly the introduction of ritual marriage in the place of natural or common law marriage. *Ahattinai* was then taken over by the Bhakti poets who used its rich and suggestive conventions to describe their love of the Lord either as

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Nayika or her girl-friend or mother and then by other poets who used it to glorify the romantic virtues of kings and chieftains.

The *Atruppadai* genre was more easily and directly taken over by the Saivaite Bhakti poets. They claimed that the days of munificent human chieftains were over and Lord Siva was the only munificent chieftain worth singing about. This enabled them to sing about the beauties of nature round every temple, treating the temple as a chieftain's castle and going on pilgrimages from one temple to another as the Sangam minstrels did from one chieftain to another. The *Atruppadai* genre while it was less intensely emotional, allowed much greater freedom in terms of description of nature including animal life and equal freedom in praising the munificence or *Saulabhaya* of the Lord in the temple. Moreover, since it was closely allied with music and minstrels, it imported the same association into Bhakti. A telling example of this association was the way Gnanasambandha was favoured by Lord Siva with golden cymbals to keep rythm and the way he was constantly accompanied on the harp by the Yazh player called Neelakanta. We may also add that the intense emotionalism of *Aham* gave Bhakti poems an equally emotional character and this enriched music even as music enriched the Bhava. The Saivite devotees drew more from the *Atruppadai* genre while the Vaishnavites drew more heavily from the *Aham* genre. Both together gave Bhakti a richness which it did not have in its embryonic shape in North India.

Let us repeat the main point on this exploration. The rise of Bhakti to pre-eminence in Hindu life and society was based upon three secular factors namely, the slow decline without disintegration of the political realm, and the absorption of the two virile elements from secular Sangam literature namely *Aham* romanticism and *Atruppadai* glorification of nature and munificence. As a result of this secular parentage and nursing, Bhakti maintained its symbolic relation with

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secular life, both in terms of emotional content and in terms of institutional support. It is this relation that I call both a symbiosis and a synthesis and it is this relationship that has been misunderstood by enthusiasts who want to glorify the product without looking into its origin and its context.

This symbiotic relation was preserved for several centuries for two complementary reasons. In North India, after Muslim conquests, the Hindus progressively lost interest in the political realm except in Rajputana and this drove them more and more into the realm of religion and culture. At the same time, some elements of secularism had to be preserved when they had lost all control of politics and government. This meant the invasion of several aspects of secular society by the Bhakti aspect of religion and conversely the invasion of some aspects of Bhakti by secular elements. Thus Krishna's romanticism was both secular and sacred in North India and Kathak dance and Hindustani classical music incorporate openly both secular and sacred elements. There was a further reason operating in North India. The musicians in particular, had to please their royal Muslim patrons or Muslimized Hindu patrons and they also tried at the same time to incorporate some elements of folk music. Thus Hindustani music developed several modes of expression such as Ghazal and Thumri, based on secular romanticism without reference to Krishna, side by side with Krishna romanticism.

In South India, where Hindu political control was re-established and lasted till the British conquest, the performing arts were institutionalised round the temple thus giving them a misleading appearance of sacralization. In fact, the deity in the temple was equated with a king and the temple with a palace, so that secular elements with sensuous pleasure could be included in the guise of Rajopachara. This king-god concept was absolutely central to the preservation of arts in South India and it is explored in some detail in the third Chapter. We may, however, repeat that

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the concept was a major result of the symbiotic relation between the sacred and the secular. Another important result of this symbiosis was the complementary relation between elite art and folk art, postponing the rise of the Western type of mass culture in India for a long while. We are exploring this theme in the second chapter.

We may repeat finally that the main thrust of this chapter is not to deny the religious bases of Indian music and dance, but to establish its socio-historic context first, and then to stress the symbiotic nature of the secular and the sacred in India's performing arts. This relation, we maintain, may be somewhat muted in the visual arts of sculpture and architecture but it becomes more obvious in the case of the performing arts.

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CHAPTER II

RELIGION AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND FOLK ART

—Prof. V. Subramaniam

Both from a Marxist angle and from the point of view of advocates of popular culture, the marriage of religion and art through Bhakti had a damaging effect in two ways namely in suppressing a distinct popular art consciousness on the one hand and in delaying modern pop-culture on the other. There is some truth in each of these view points and it is worth examining the socio-economic effects of the influence of Bhakti on art over the centuries in the short note. This can only be exploratory as material for a detailed examination does not exist or has not been dug up by professional historians.

We may start by distinguishing classical or elitist art from folk art and other forms of art on the basis of the economics of production and consumption. Elitist art or classical art is based upon a patron-client relation in pre-industrial traditional society with a moderate economic surplus appropriated by the economically dominant class. The class has the advantage of leisure ; some of its members may use it to practice and develop budding artistic talent or

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to promote art appreciation and art consciousness in their own class. Secondly, a part of the economic surplus can be used by it to discover and reward artistic talent from other classes. This patron-client relationship has survived for several centuries and has to some extent toned down class antagonisms. Folk art on the other hand is essentially participatory without much of an economic dimension. It is purely participatory in a small tribal society where all adults take part in group dances, group singing and group drama. At a more advanced level some economics is introduced when useful art-effects are produced by some people of the society who specialise in this and are sold at a slight profit.

Ananda Coomaraswamy took over the traditional distinction in Indian aesthetics between Margi and Desi styles as a distinction between classical and folk art, in the last essay of his book '*Why exhibit works of art.*' This was drawn essentially from books written by advocates of classical art and Coomaraswamy was only interested to show that this distinction existed in Indian art history as in any other civilisation. Dr. V. Raghavan examined the distinction in greater detail in an essay in the Journal of the Madras Music Academy but also essentially from the view point of classical aesthetics. He added two important points namely that the distinction is one of degree depending on the level of sophistication and secondly that these two art forms influenced each other throughout Indian art history. Neither Coomaraswamy nor Raghavan have shown any interest in the economic factor and this is essential in understanding the power of religion in keeping *elitist* and folk art together.

A third mixed form of art was probably the most influential in Indian as well as mediavel art history namely elitist art on free exhibition. Elitist art works owned by rich patrons were kept away from popular view while such works commissioned and collected by the Catholic church in Europe and by the Hindu temple in India were there for

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all to see. Similarly works in the performing arts were also put on free as a matter of course by Hindu temples and perhaps less frequently by the Catholic church through organising mystery plays and church music. In many subtle ways, this exhibited classical art encouraged a general feeling that it belonged to everybody and also promoted the cultivation of more taste in classical art by a small minority from the lower classes.

Popular art in the modern sense of mass produced and widely consumed art, such as films and rock music needs some socio-economic pre-conditions. These may be listed as widespread literacy and an industrial society, the eventual abolition of traditional gemeinschaft, a total money economy with widespread purchasing power on the one hand and entreprenuerial classes which can mass produce popular art for consumption on the same line as cars, scooters or bicycles for purchase and distribution through the manipulation of the market by advertising and other ways. This list of pre-conditions seems to involve the progressive industrialisation as well as secularisation of society. Studies on how this happened in Western Europe and North America do reveal the connection between all these factors but do not help to understand why the process was delayed and postponed in India. This short note attempts to refer to certain factors involved in Indian history.

Let us simplify European art history of the last two centuries to make the comparisons. All art was either classical elitist art, private or on public exhibition and folk art. The secularisation of European Society began with the Rennaisance and carried on through the Reformation. But by itself this did not make a deep impact on art except in countries like Holland where the commercial patrons took over the role of the Church and the Burghers became the consumers of art. Secularisation had to be followed by the other factors such as industrialisation, urbanisation and literacy. We need not go into the debate as to whether capitalism

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was purely a product of economic factors or was inspired largely by the Protestant ethic. The essential factor is that church art on exhibition slowly began to play a less important part in social life, partly because Protestant countries had much less of it, while Catholic countries began to exhibit strong tendencies towards anti-clericalism. The secularisation of painting began in the 19th century for several reasons which have still not been closely examined. But the economic reason is obvious. Paintings could be sold on a larger scale to patrons and this meant that portrait paintings and paintings of secular scenes took precedence over Biblical themes. But the true effects on secularisation could not be felt beyond the range of the middle classes till mass literacy and economic growth put more purchasing power and a keenness for entertainment in the hands of large masses of people on the one hand and produced an entrepreneurial class prepared to exploit this market. Lord North Cliffe showed the way in regard to tabloid newspapers while the American film industry and later American Pop Music expanded the whole arena to cover not only North America but the whole English speaking world. While it seems a rather quick process after the event and in the total context of history, we need to realise that it went through several steps for about two centuries. It was not accidental that secularism came first and industrialisation and its adjuncts followed, thus preparing favourable conditions for pop-art.

We can probably shorten and compress the Indian story by saying that none of these conditions obtained in India till the Second World War. But that is over simplifying picture. In fact religion provided such an effective bridge between classical temple art on exhibition and the people with their folk art that even with important economic changes in Indian Society modern popular art in the shape of films could not take shape for a long while.

The Hindu temple considered as a palace became the

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centre of practically all Hindu artistic activity from the time of the later Bhakti Movement, while the deity in the temple was equated with a king. We are dealing with the artistic implications of this king-god concept in the next chapter. Let us, however, mention its important consequences here. Firstly the performing arts in the temple and other forms of entertainment could be carried on without any Puritanical fear of violating sacred norms as Rajopachara or artistic service to the king. Thus practically all the erotic elements in dance could be preserved partly as an offering to a pleasure-loving king and partly in continuation of the Aham romantic tradition. Similarly, music both devotional and sensuous, could be sung or played and several other types of entertainment without any religious content can be put on free under the auspices of the temple. Classical art of the higher elitistic character and folk art of the most vulgar type were both offered free as Rajopachara to the deity and on a free basis to the populace. This meant that a very wide choice was offered to the economically upper class as well as the lower. The artistically sophisticated among poor classes could enjoy the more sophisticated forms of art as freely as the artistically vulgar section of the richer class could enjoy vulgar forms of popular art without provoking comment. One interesting off-shot of this situation was the wealth of hard hitting jokes against the artistically vulgar rich in various Indian languages.

Muslim invasion of India and the establishment of Muslim rule in North India followed by strong Hindu resistence in the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire in the South, all these entrenched the foregoing situation. Deprived of political power the Hindus in the north turned more to the religio-cultural realm. In the South, the duty of protecting the Hindu Dharma was placed on the shoulder of Hindu Emperors and this intensified relation between religion and art. Religious divisions had more or less toned down, class divisions among the Hindus and as a result the religious bridge between elitist and folk art continued to be strong.

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Nor did British rule change the situation much because of the nature of class formation in colonial societies of the 19th and 20th centuries. I have discussed my theory of the derivative middle class in detail in an appendix to my book *Transplanted Indo-British Administration* (Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977). Briefly, British imperial conquest of India led to a peculiarly new method of confrontation of the conquerors and the conquered, for the first time in history. Quite apart from differences of race, colour, creed and technological development, there was a more fundamental difference between the two societies. The conquering British society was based on functional voluntary groups or Geselschaft while conquered Indian society was based upon Gemeinschaft or natural groups such as caste, village, tribe, etc. In earlier confrontations between the conquerors and the conquered as between the Huns, Mongols or Turks and the conquered population, straight forward methods of interaction such as inter-marriage and religious conversion or genoicide bridged gaps between the two. But a new method was needed in this new situation. As a result of this new confrontation a new intermediatory class of educated professional and salaried groups was formed which I call the Derivative Middle Class. It soon developed four characteristics; it was derivative, imitative, lopsided and frustrated. Unlike the natural middle class of Western Europe which arose out of the internal social factors such as Protestant Reformation, voyages of discovery, urbanisation, capitalism, industrialisation, etc. this class was derived from the compulsions of colonial confrontation and so we call it derivative. This class consisted essentially of clerks, lawyers, teachers and other salaried groups or professionals, mainly because the colonial situation needed only these for mediating purposes. Lawyers were needed to interpret customary law to the British and British Common law to the Indians; clerks were needed to interpret people's demands to the higher administrators and the decisions of the latter to the people and teachers were needed to produce both. On the other hand, commercial entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and distri-

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butors were not needed because the colonial power wanted to exploit the natural resources and the resultant commerce for its own people organised in firms. Hence local industry and entrepreneurship were discouraged. Hence this class was lopsided with only a professional wing and no economic wing. This class was imitative as part of its mode of doing business. It had to imitate the colonial administrators in regard to punctuality and separating office work from domestic problems. It was frustrated because there was only limited room for the development of this class in the restricted colonial economy and the demands of this class for more positions in administration and more political control and more social equality were all arrogantly rejected by the imperial rulers.

The major point of interest for us is that this class was essentially a professional and salaried class basing itself on formal education. Hence it was drawn very heavily from the higher literary Hindu castes namely, Brahmins and Kayastas in the North and some upper non-Brahmin castes in the South. These groups were essentially suppressed during the semi-feudal Muslim regimes and even Hindu's ones as administration was based essentially on executive ability and not book-learning, whereas in the new situation formal education was the passport to administrative position. Hence these literary castes formed the new educated elites in North and South India and when they grew in numbers they led the nationalist movement and finally took over political and administrative power in independent India. Thus there was continuous connection from traditional religio-cultural values through the literary castes which grew under British rule to societal values after independence. These castes preserved the old link between classical art and folk art for a long while even after a modern economy was established in India. The villagers and the urban poor were essentially taught to regard upper class and middle class values as best in art. As a result, early productions of the Indian film industry were all based on religious stories and

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were full of classical music. It was not till after the Second World War when the urban poor and the village folk began to express their own artistic needs that the film producers saw the possibilities and started exploiting the market.

Nowhere else has religion based art dominate taste so long as in India. It had its credit side in that upper caste elitist tastes in music and dance were regarded as universally superior by the others. It could not have lasted and its chief weakness was its lack of foresight about the rise of popular art and a total lack of sympathy about its societal contribution.

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CHAPTER III

THE KING-GOD CONCEPT AND THE ARTS

—Prof. V. Subramaniam

The King-God concept or the symbolic identification of the presiding deity of a temple as a King or Emperor was probably the most useful and productive instrument evolved by the Bhakti Movement, particularly in the domain of the arts. It has two major achievements to its credit; it preserved and promoted the performing arts in particular, and it also provided a basis for popular resistance to misrule and tyranny. To understand the full importance of these contributions we need to set the concept against the background of the fairly widespread symbolic relation between divinity and royalty in several civilizations and its two facets in Hindu civilization. We may outline our work as follows :

(*a*) Most societies, primitive or advanced, had, till a few centuries ago associated royalty with divinity, total or limited, and differed from one another chiefly in interpreting this association. Only a few peoples like the Jews, Puritans and Hindus had developed the converse concept of accepting a deity as King. This latter concept played a far greater and more important part in Hindu society over the

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centuries than the former more universal idea of divine kingship, but this has been somewhat obscured by the concentration of academic attention on the Hindu concept of God-King for various reasons.

(*b*) The King-God concept is mainly and initially a product of the Bhakti Movement of Tamil Nadu and drew inspiration from the *Ahattinai* and *Atruppadai* genres of Tamil poetry of the Sangam age on the one hand and from the *Pancaratra* school on the other, which played a more important part in legitimizing the concept in the formal practices of temple worship.

(*c*) This concept was the most productive and protective concept in all the arts in general and the performing arts in particular in South India for over ten centuries. At the same time, it provided a bridge between the secular and sacred realms and its frequent use made such a distinction a mere hazy formality. It was also useful in providing some moral basis for resistance to Muslim rule mainly in several parts of North India.

Let us now elaborate our thesis step by step.

I

There is a substantial mass of evidence from the study of ancient civilizations and medieval societies by historians and from researches on tribal and primitive contemporary societies by anthropologists that indicates a regular association of kingship and divinity in popular imagination and legend, in societal myths, sacred literature and in more rationalistic explanation as well.[1] The nature and degree of this association and its interpretation, with or without some mediation, varied widely but the God-King association

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itself was almost univerval. There is little room for surprise in this for, next to the father or mother metaphor for God, the other natural metaphor derives from the ruler of the clan or country, giving rise to the concepts of the divine king and the kingly God. The former, however, seems to be much more widely prevalent.[2] This may be due to a practical need for kings and chieftains to legitimize their authority through assuming some divine association and it may be equally due to the fact that social scientists have paid more attention to it.

The foregoing observations help us to put Hindu ideas of divine kingship in perspective as a particular and perhaps sophisticated variation of a fairly universal phenomenon. It has, of course, received considerable attention from political scientists and Indologists from the turn of the century. The latter group has been influenced by the work of Coedes on the Angkor complex and his interpretation of the evidence to conclude that the Khmer Kings claimed total divinity or identity with Lord Siva.[3] This was quite widely accepted partly because of the impressive scholarship displayed in the interpretation and partly because many Western students of the East were mentally prepared to accept the probability of such a phenomenon in the East. The interpretation is being disputed for good reasons and this writer would take the critics seriously in the light of the weakness of the concept of divine kingship in mainland India.[4]

The concept as such is to be found in several works of sacred Hindu literature, stated, reiterated, modified and embellished, but the main task is to interpret the diverse mass of evidence in a balanced manner. There are plenty of texts and stories in the Shashtras and Puranas on the divinity of kings and his unchallengeable superiority over other human beings and there is an equal number of stories about 'evil' kings going to ruin.

Unfortunately, there was an earlier tendency among

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Western social scientists to stress the former type of evidence as it was in tune with widespread ideas of oriental depotism.[5] The balancing of the available evidence on both sides has been somewhat neglected for various reasons and the early attempts of Indian scholars went too far in the opposite direction to argue that republics were the norm and kingship the exception in ancient India.[6] We suggest that a careful balancing of the evidence shows that controlled and conditional kingship evolved as the norm.

The references ascribing divinity to a king in Hindu Shastric and Puranic literature are more or less variations of the legend of the creation of a king from the essence of all the Gods by Prajapati.[7] The partial and total divinity of Rama and Krishna as kings probably played no part in buttressing this original legend, as these two were appropriated as incarnations by later priestly writers and kept out of the discussion. As against the clear ascription of divinity to a king and the performance of various religious court rituals to buttress and proclaim his divinity, we must consider the several factors which reduced its strength considerably.

(*i*) The most basic of these factors was the diluted meaning of divinity as such in ancient India. "Divinity was cheap" as Professor Basham put it pithily.[8] Almost everyone was in one of his capacities a god to someone else, the husband to his wife and the Guru to the disciple. The position was clarified and streamlined much later by gradually adding the concepts of Avatara, Amsa, Amsavatara, Archavatara and Avasara and instituting some hierarchy of divinities from time to time. This diluted divinity continued as a permanent feature of Hindu thinking in general and political thought.

(*ii*) More specifically, Hindu political thinkers and writers placed Dharma or Universal Law above Danda, the coercive power of royal authority—after some period of debate. We see traces of this continuing discussion in

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Shastras and Puranas. The strongest advocate of consolidated royal power was Kautilya but even he had to make some conventional genuflexions in the direction of Dharma.[9] He was careful not to rely too much on theories of divine origins but more on purely practical measures to consolidate the king's earthly power against all rivals including priests, monks and religious men and advised the king to test his ministers against even "religious allurement."[10] But his school of thought was ultimately thrust into oblivion by the Dharma school through condemnation as well as censorship. It was probably helped too by Buddhist dilution of royal divinity by calling kings Sammati Devas or Gods by general consent. The most generally accepted line of political thinking portrayed Dharma as the ruler and the king as its viceregent who was upheld by Dharma so long as he upheld it.[11] We do not have a detailed account but only glimpses of how the issue was joined by both parties. The general outcome, however, was the Dharmic theory of kingship.

(*iii*) Recent and ongoing research on the early evolution of kingship both in North and South India seems to point to a slow process of evolution in which a crucial part was played by ritualistic legitimation. It is likely that tribal chieftains were the norm in the Vedic period, that this institution broadened into republics with councils on the one hand, and into kingship with advisers on the other, partly in imitation of the evolution in Persia. The latter evolution was strengthened by polygamous intermarriages with leading families and was legitimised by several rituals including the famous Aswamedha yaga or horse sacrifice. In the case of the Pallava dynasty of South India, this seems to be fairly documented.[12] It is important to note that ritual legitimation depended totally on Brahmin priests and any 'divinity' conferred thereby was "conditional".

(*iv*) The central factors in making royal divinity cribbed and conditional were the later Puranic legends which were more basic in popular education than prescriptive sacred

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literature. A few Upanishads contain the odd story of the triumph of Kshatriya common sense and wisdom over Brahmin conventional knowledge and high presumption[13]—but these were on the whole less widely known. Moreover, Kshatriya glorification was more associated with the Protestant religions of Buddhism and Jainism. The mainstream of Hindu legend included rather deliberately, several warnings to overconfident kings assuming 'unconditional' divinity. We may refer to the major stories to make this point.

To my knowledge there is nothing comparable to the story of the continuous humiliation of Indra, King of the Gods, for his sins against Brahmin gurus and monks in the myths of any other civilization. The story is told in both *Mahabharata* and *Bhaghavatapurana*. Indra ignores his Guru Bruhaspathi in his Sabha on the assumption that the King is supreme according to the Shastras, loses his services, becomes weak, hires Viswarupa, son of Twashta and an Asura mother, and after benefitting from his guidance kills him out of suspicion. Twashta creates Vritra to fight and kill Indra and Vritra worsts Indra in battle. After an uneasy truce, Indra kills him by guile on an evening and is cursed to suffer for killing a Brahmin by treachery. He goes into shameful hiding to endure the consequences of his sins—while the Rishis seek out and crown an earthly King Nahusha as King of the Gods. After a period of prosperous rule, he lusts for the wife of Indra, *i.e.* Indrani, who asks him to come riding in a palanquin carried by the great seven Brahmin Rishis. Arrogant and lustful, he goads the Rishis and kicks one of them with his foot, and is cursed to become a python. There is thus a total of four humiliations for Brahmin—insulting and Brahmin—murder, three for Indra and one for the temporary incumbent of his position—all within this single story told by Salya to his nephews, the Pandavas in *Mahabharata*.[14]

There are at least two other well known stories of Indra's humiliation at the hands of angry Brahmins. In the

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well known story of beautiful Ahalya in *Ramayana*, Indra is caught cheating her husband, sage Gautama—in adultery with Ahalya—and is cursed with cruel bodily defilement by him.[15] In the other story, negligent Indra is presented with a special garland by sage Durvasa, which his elephant Iravata tramples underfoot, and the angry Durvasa curses him with ruin.[16] We may add that apart from Indra, several other lesser Gandharva kings and chieftains were cursed by angry Brahmin Rishis with various humiliations.

These legends of Indra's humiliation were buttressed by two stronger ones later in each of which, a king assuming divinity claims worship from Brahmins and is ultimately destroyed without a trace. The more well known one is that of King Hiranya Kasipu, who claims sole and total divinity, and has himself worshipped as the God. The story of retribution starts when his dear son Prahlada refuses to do this and worships Lord Vishnu. Challenging him about Vishnu's omnipresence, Hiranya Kasipu asks whether he would come out of a particular pillar, and when Prahlada assures him, he strikes the pillar. Vishnu emerges in the fierce shape of a man-lion, kills Hiranya Kasipu by taking out his entrails. While this story from *Bhagavatapurana* has been widely interpreted in terms of the power of Vishnubhakti, the lesson for kings affecting total unconditional divinity seems to be equally clear or stronger.[17] The story of King Vena included in the same *Bhagavatapurana* gives the message perhaps more clearly without the complication of Vishnubhakti. Vena takes the Brahmin's scriptural legend of a king being the embodiment of all the gods seriously and demands the obeisance of Brahmins and is ultimately murdered by them. This direct confrontation between the bare text (represented by King Vena) and the interpreters establishes more effectively the conditional nature of the King's divinity.[18] We may add that even the story of emperor Mahabali, benevolent, virtuous and limitlessly generous, losing his kingdom out of high presumption as the Maha Sriman, the owner of all that was, drives home the point that even

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great virtue does not save a king affecting near total divinity. I suspect that the Indra stories were finalized in the later Gupta period and the three stories of Hiranya Kasipu, Vena and Mahabali were added on to the earlier stories of Indra and Gandharva kings somewhat later and included in the *Bhagavatapurana* to reinforce thoroughly the conditional, cribbed and cosmetic nature of the king's divinity.

We may also note that from the decline of the Gupta Empire about the end of the 5th century the political realm itself was being discounted by the intellectuals.[19] There is considerable evidence of this in the Puranas finalized in the Guptan and post-Guptan periods and in the later Sanskrit Kavyas down to the eleventh century. Most of them take the political divisions and diversities of India for granted. Of course, imperial unification of India by conquest, advocated by Kautilya had obviously failed by that time. The Guptan empire, in spite of its glory was smaller than the Mauryan, and the last Hindu empire of Harsha of the 7th century was a loose federal structure. It is hard to say now which of the two—gradual failure of imperial unification or the scaling down the importance of the political realm—was cause and which the consequence. They seem to have gone together, and the dilution of the God-King concept over this period may be seen also as a related development. We can again see how the development of the King-God concept was facilitated by the decline of the God-King concept.

II

It is impossible to attribute a precise or even approximate date for the evolution of the King-God concept. We notice that it was accepted as a valid and working concept by the 12th century in South India and was gradually beginning to take root in North India. It is rather difficult to identify clearly the various stages of its evolution all over India but it is somewhat easier to recognize how the concept was developed in South India through the cross-fertilization.

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of *Pancaratra* with some early Tamil poetic genres namely *Atruppadai* and *Ahattinai.*

The penetration of general practices of Krishna worship and specific *Pancaratra* practices may by traced in Alwar poetry if not any earlier. Thus Tondaradippodi and Perialwar were Brahmin temple priests in the *Pancaratra* tradition.[20] This is borne out partly by their own words and more clearly by the defense of their status by *Yamunacarya* later in the 10th century. Tondaradippodi not only proclaims his joy in serving the Lord in the Srirangam temple, but is aggressively critical of other (Smarta ?) Brahmins who look askance at temple service—in the last seven verses of his *Tirumalai.* Moreover his other work *Tiruppalli-eluchi* refers to an evolving temple ritual of early morning worship vaguely allied to court rituals.[21] Perialwar gives further details of the practices of temple worship in his *Tiruppallandu,* about how he is happy to take the food and clothes offered to the Lord for his use respectfully. These two may be placed between the sixth and ninth century. *Yamunacarya's* major work *Agamapramanyam* of the tenth century clearly assumes the existence of a class of *Pancaratra* priests in Vishnu temples and defends them against the ridicule and criticisms of Smarta Brahmins.[22] Again if we place Sankara in the 5-6th centuries, his references to the Bhagavathas may indicate some penetration of *Pancaratra* down south. We may, therefore, conclude that *Pancaratra* traditions and practices were seeping down south from at least the sixth century and by the 10th they were clearly established in the south among the Vaishnavites.

It is far less clear whether the concept of Vishnu as King in the temple was an integral part of *Pancaratra* by the sixth century or even by the 9th. Heroworship of Vasudeva of the Vrishni clan has been referred to as part of the early Bhagavatha cult but this can be regarded only as a germinal part of the King-God concept.[23] The Vaishnavite concept of Avatara too was still not full-fledged right till the 4th

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century.[24] We may, therefore, presume that *Pancaratra* just legitimized temple service for a class of Brahmins in Tamilnadu in its early days and at the most, vaguely suggested some equivalence with royal service. A much more important contribution took shape by the cross-fertilization of early *Pancaratra* with the Tamil poetic genre of *Atruppadai* in the context of Tamil ideas of Kingship.

The king was held in high regard in Tamil society as attested by the poetry of the Sangam period and by *Tirukkural* but divinity was not attached to him except casually.[25] Thus a Sangam verse states that neither land nor water is the soul of a country but the king is. Most of the poems in the *Puram* genre of Sangam literature glorified the generosity and valour of several kings. At the same time, divine royalty was a casual marginal concept stated in passing conditionally in *Tirukkural* and elsewhere. This was of a piece with the highly secular nature of Tamil poetry of the Sangam period (2nd B.C.—4 A.D.) which we presume reflected the character of Tamil society. This poetic literature dealt with the love of man and woman under the genre of *Aham* or *Ahattinai* and human valour and generosity under the genre of *Puram*. There were no prayer songs prefacing works of poetry whether they were anthologies or long poems. Indeed wherever there was some indirect prayer to a deity it was said in connection with wishing the king well.[26]

We also note that there are very few stories critical of the arrogance or wickedness of evil kings in this literature. Indeed the one notable reference is to Nannan and his deeds are rather venial compared to the "sins" of evil kings in Sanskrit Puranas.[27] Most other kings were easily deflected from possible cruelty by the advice of elderly wise poets. We may infer that stories of the punishment of evil kings were less necessary in the secular atmosphere of Tamilnadu where kings were not attributed divinity. We may also presume that the Tamil situation as a whole discouraged the idea of divine kingship but did not discourage the converse idea of a King-God.

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This took shape in the first instance and essentially by substituting Lord Vishnu or Siva in the place of munificent chieftain in the *Atruppadai* genre of poetry. This genre which is a subsection of *Puram* usually takes the form of a lucky minstrel who received generous gifts from a king or chieftain, showing the way to another indigent minstrel. This provides the occasion to sing of the chieftain's land and castle and their natural beauty, his victories in war and his generosity, and marginally about his romantic nature. This genre was a most popular section of *Puram*, as five out of ten long poems in the Sangam group *Pathuppattu* belong to it. One may add that poets might have found it remunerative as well.

The substitution of God for chieftain occurs right in the earliest work of Tamil Bhakti poetry, *i.e. Murugatruppadai*, and the metaphor is sustained directly and indirectly throughout the Bhakti poetry of both the Vaishnavite devotees or Alwars and Saivite devotees or Nayanars. Let us see how.

(*a*) In the first place, some of them say directly that earthly patrons are useless or non-existent and Lord Vishnu or Siva is the tirelessly generous patron. The major references generally belong to the later part of the Bhakti Movement in Tamilnadu though Appar's defiant declaration that he is no king's subject comes very early. But in spelling out the equation of the Lord with a Vallal, Nammalwar's Tiruvaimoli III.9 and Sundaramurti's Devaram on Tiruppugalur are more direct, as may be seen from the following extracts.[28]

Nammalwar :

You may dislike it and yet
I will say this; so listen please;
I will not make poems on anyone,
When my Lord and Master is there
In Tiruvenkatam full of
bees singing his glory.

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How long will these gifts last, oh poets !
Who degrade yourself singing of human patrons.
Come and sing of the great patron, Lord Manivannan
Who gives all you want and yet
Has more to give.

Come, oh Poets ! Work with your hands and limbs
For there are no rich patrons on earth now.
If you sing of your favouritc deity,
The songs will all go to praise Tirumal.

Of Him only—of limitless gifts and
of a thousand names will I sing.
Of little men, I will not sing a tissue of lies
That they are generous like the rain—cloud
Or have firm shoulders like hills.

Sundaramurti :

Even if you praise them and
Anticipate their wishes
These false (patrons) will not give.
Sing not about them but
Sing of the Lord of Pugalur;
Without a doubt, you will have food and shelter now
And flourish in heaven later.

Even if you praise the weakling as Bhima
or Arjuna, the hero of the bow,
Even if you flatter the miser
As the generous Pari,
No one gives you a thing, oh poets;
Sing of the Lord of Pugalur
Smeared with white ash
And without a doubt,
You will flourish in the land of the Gods.

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Even if you praise a shivering old man
with white hair and infirm
As a young man of hill-like shoulders
No one gives a thing : oh Poets !

Even if you praise a miser
checking for a single grain of sesame
Who would not let a fly lick (the remains)
As a generous Vallal
No one gives a thing. Oh Poets !

This praise of the Lord as the ultra-generous Super-King in contrast to earthly kings is found off and on also in the hymns of Perialwar, Tondaradippodi and in some other hymns of Nammalwar and Sundaramurti. Appar says the same in the different context of the limited royal power of a king over him, which we shall discuss shortly.

(*b*) This poetic transfer of munificent kingship to the Lord in the temple was preceded by some transfer of court practices to the temple. According to Hardy, during and soon after the Kalabra rule in Tamilnadu, Pandya court rituals were transferred to a Mayon (Vishnu) temple.[29] More importantly, this happened in a bigger way about the 10th century over most of Tamilnadu and later over several parts of India.

(*c*) Another less direct transfer from the Atruppadai tradition was the glorification of nature round the temple, particularly in Saivite Bhakti poetry, *i.e.* Devaram. *Atruppadai* poetry described the bounty of nature round a chieftain's castle or a king's palace as a reflection of his bounty and the Devarams went further in juxtaposing nature's beauty and Lord Siva's beauty and nature's and Lord Siva's bounty. Purely as nature poetry, the Devarams of Sambandar on Annamalai, Kutralam and Kurumbala and Sundaramurti's on Sriparpada are among the best in the world.[30] The equation of the God in the temple with the King in his palace

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was thus strengthened further. More importantly, this transfiguaration of the wandering minstrel tradition added a new dimension to the practice of pilgrimage. What was earlier a visit to several Tirtas or bathing places in the *Mahabharata* was transformed into a visit to several temples each with its King-God to ask for boons or gifts.[31]

(*d*) The Saivite devotee Appar in particular added a third important element to the King-God concept, namely of recognizing no king on earth except God. His famous Devaram song of defiance is reported to have been composed when the officers of the Pallava King Mahendravarman (who was a Jain) came to take him to the King's presence for enquiry.[32] Here are a few extracts :

We are subjects of no one;
We don't fear the God of Death;
We will not suffer in hell;
We are not weaklings;
We are proud; We know no sickness,
We will not bow down to any.

It is joy for us always and
Never a moment of suffering;
We are subjects only to King
Lord Sankara, who is subject to none
who wears white conch earrings;
And to his red feet we hasten for refuge.

The orders of those who rule the earth
And who ride elephants,
We will not obey; we are free from lust.
Even if the rulers of all India
send their men to catch us
We will not obey.

This defiant aspect of the King-God concept served an important political purpose by legitimizing resistance to

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tyranny by transferring loyalty to the King-God. In practice, it was morally more effective than the Puranic tradition of the Brahmin sage cursing the arrogant king. In South India this concept proved more useful in later times to the Vaishnavites though it was proclaimed first by the founder of Tamil Saivism. It was even more effective in North India under Muslim rule where popular Hindu resistance took-over this concept in the shape of Ram Rajya and in the defiant greeting Jai Ramjiki. We may add that the editor of the first nationalist Tamil daily, *Desabhaktan*, used Appar's song as his motto when he defied the British Government's demand for security.[33] We are, however, more interested in the ramifications of this concept in the arts, and to understand this we need to discuss briefly the contribution of the *Aham* genre of poetry to this concept.

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III

The nature of *Ahattinai* and its transformation into Bhakti poetry has been analysed by us elsewhere in detail.[34] To sum it up briefly; *Ahattinai* was the dominant genre in early Tamil literature of the Sangam period (2nd B.C.—4 A.D.) and it dealt with all the phases and moods of the love of man and woman. It developed its own rules and idiom which became very elaborate in the later centuries. The poems were in the form of drama always in the first person through the mouth of a participant, say lover, beloved or friend, speaking to another participant. The identity of the participants was withheld so as to depersonalize and universalize that mood or phase of love for transmission to the reader. Nature played an important part in the background, setting the mood, and conventions were developed relating a particular type of land, say Mullai or the foothills, a particular flower, say Jasmine, with a particular mood in love, *e.g.* separation. We have also traced in detail how this dominant poetic genre interacted with Aryan ascetic schools of philosophy and Aryan ritualism and with serious socio-political upheavals in South India and how out of this

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interaction were born two new genres of poetry namely the Bhakti poetry of Alwars and Nayanmars and courtly romantic poetry.

The crucial development for our enquiry is that these two were born and grew up together. The *Ahattinai* categories were employed by the Alwars, Tirumangai, Nammalwar, Kulasekhara and Andal mainly to express their feminine love for Lord Krishna as the super-male. Thus the rich and sophisticated eroticism of *Ahattinai* became a formative integral part of Bhakti for the Lord, and all that was beautiful and erotic in art could consequently be associated with, offered to, and derived from fervent devotion for the Lord.

At the same time another group of poets began to use *Ahattinai* grammar and idiom to glorify the romantic virtues of princes, along with their military prowess and generosity. This required pushing aside the *Aham* convention of not mentioning the names of participants in love. It is hard to decide whether it was the Bhakti poets or court poets who ignored this convention first. Historically, the work of the Sangam period, *Nedunalvadai* of the Aham genre, by casually mentioning the Pandya King, might have set an example.[35] But it required the persistent use of *Aham* genre to express devotion for Krishna by name that made the convention of anonymity obsolete and legitimized its violaton.

It seems as if Bhakti poetry and courtly poetry grew together with similar features namely, a strong common erotic bent together with the glorification of heroic Puram virtues such as valour and generosity. The same Krishna the lover was the slayer of demons and the same broadchested victorious Pandya King was the romantic ideal of young maidens.[36] This parallel growth of Bhakti and courtly poetry along with the appropriation of *Attruppadai* conventions by Bhakti poets provided the ideal climate for the final stage in the evolution of the King-God concept. Thus it was not only accepted as a key concept before the 10th century but

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its sensuous associations with *Ahattinai*, justified the use of all the sensuous arts such as music and dancing along with pomp and ceremony. Indeed these were getting sacralized in a parallel manner from at least the 6th century. Karaikkal Ammai's praise of dancing Siva and the references to the dances of the Gods in *Silappadikaram* indicate the evolution of sacred associations as does the setting to music of Gnana Sambanda's songs.[37]

It is difficult to sort out clearly cause and effect in this evolution, but it is apparent that local south Indian factors played the major part in it, while *Pancaratra* was in the background providing general doctrinal support to the new institution of temple service. At some suitable stage about the ninth or tenth century, the *Agamas*, both Vaishnavite and Saivite, explicitly institutionalised *Rajopachara* as an integral part of temple worship. By this time *Agamic* literature itself had grown in detail, size and sophistication to include some variety of theistic philosophy, some description of icons and icon-making, some particulars about religious duties, and details about temple worship, which began to incorporate music and dances. Parallel with this evolution of the *Agamas*, the institution of *Devadasis* or temple dancing girls was also taking shape even from the 6th century.[38] By the late tenth century the evolution of the King-God concept was nearly complete, with all its theological, political and artistic implications. Various deities had taken on distinctive royal names, such as Devaraja or Varadaraja of Kanchi, Tyagaraja of Tiruvarur, Rangaraja of Srirangam and Nataraja as well as Govindaraja of Chidambaram. The ceremonies in the Srirangam temple were taking on a courtly character, already under Yamunacharya and more so under Ramanuja, and this committed the temple's devotees to revere and defend it like a fort and palace for centuries.[39]

We are more interested in the artistic implications of the wide acceptance of this concept. To put it pithily, the

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temple became the centre of the plastic, visual and the performing arts for centuries from then on till now. The *Agamas* legitimized this development in elaborate detail, giving minute particulars about the position of musical instruments, Ragas to be played and dance items to be performed.[40] Conversely, the later classics on dance included particulars about ritual dances in temples on festive and ordinary occasions and leading musicians and composers such as Ramaswamy Dikshitar and Muthuswamy Dikshitar were involved in the reorganization of temple festivals and rituals.[41] The development and changes in these over the centuries recorded in temple inscriptions, copperplates and other archival material will yield to the devoted researcher rich rewards in terms of South Indian art history. Apart from such written records, practically all our historical knowledge of dance poses and musical instruments is derived from temple sculptures, mainly after the entrenchment of the King God concept.[42]

We may add that the King-God metaphor has continued to generate new ideas and practices right till the last century, as illustrated by the rise of the genre of *Kuravanji* and the ambivalent character of the Varnam in Bharatanatyam. Towards the later part of the Bhakti period, a flexible poetic genre called Ula (meaning procession) took shape, taking inspiration from the *Atruppadai* genre. It describes the glory of a King or a God in grand procession, giving details of his beauty, physique, dress, ornaments and carriage, the caparisoned elephants and horses and the reactions of the onlookers. It is not clear whether the first Ula was in praise of a King or Lord Siva[43], but Ulas on both Kings and Gods were composed by poets for centuries as the genre could include descriptive 'Puram' material about wealth and glory as well as emotive 'Aham' material on how the onlookers were struck with wonder, love or admiration.

In the late 18th century, Tirikuta Raja Kavi of Kutralam added the gypsy motif to the Ula to evolve the popular

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Kuravanji dance drama. In his *Kutralakkuravanji*, Lord Siva goes in grand procession and the heroine Vasantavalli warches and falls in love. Dazed, depressed and anxious, she meets a mountain gypsy (Kurathi) who reads her palm and predicts the fulfilment of her love. After the usual sending of messages, it all ends in a happy union. The format was so well adapted to dancing in the form of a dance-drama that it was accepted in the Tanjore Maharajah's court and was soon emulated by other composers.[44] One of them composed almost immediately after, a Kuravanji on the Tanjore Rajah himself called *Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuravanji*, while Kavi Kunjara Bharati of Sivaganga soon after composed one on Lord Vishnu of Alagarmalai called *Alagar Kuravanji*. Several more Kuravanjis have been composed since then and this writer has composed one on Sujata, the shepherd girl who gave milk to a tired Buddha and revived him.[45] The evolution of the Kuravanji genre is a clear example of the easy transferability of a poetic genre from God to King or *vice versa*.

The Varnam, the centrepiece of a Bharatanatyam performance, has also the same flexibility and ambivalence, if not the same long historical background. Whatever its predecessor was, the Varnam was developed by the Tanjore brothers as a long romantic piece branching off into the other emotions from love.[46] Right from its early days, Varnams were composed with equal facility and frequency about Rajahs and Zamindars as about deities. If it was a king, the deity he worshipped was introduced into the song to give it a tinge of Bhakti. But in terms of the main emotions portrayed there was little difference between a Varnam on a local Zamindar or on a temple deity, except when a Varnam specifically stressed fear and wonder in part as Muthuswamy Dikshitar's "Rupamu Joochi".[47]

Our exploration of the King-God metaphor has highlighted its two main features. It originated in a transformation of two secular genres of poetry namely *Ahattinai* and

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Atruppadai into Bhakti poetry and the simultaneous interaction of this transformation with *Pancaratra* concepts of temple service. Hence it retained its romantic bias even while it acquired a political dimension in its proud resistance of earthly kings. It is this artistic-romantic aspect that distinguishes the Hindu King-God from the Hebrew "Kingship of God",[48] as the simultaneous rise of courtly romantic poetry with Bhakti poetry, and their mutual interaction stressed the artistic side of the concept more than its political side.

This was further helped by the general commitment of all South Indian ruling dynasties, Cholas, Pandyas and the Vijayanagar viceroys, to support the temple as the *centre* of communal and artistic activity, followed by the concomitant support of wealthy merchants and indeed all members of the Hindu community. The temple thus evolved as a permanent patron of the arts for centuries providing a reliable source of livelihood for generations of artists, and at the same time providing them with a regular captive audience of community members enjoying this art freely at their leisure. We have already discussed in Chapter II how this elitist art on free exhibition kept away the rise of modern mass art for a long while. All in all, the King-God concept shaped Indian artistic history from the 10th century onwards more powerfully than any other influence. Its effect was more patent in the performing arts where it let the free play of the sensuous take any form or shape, and kept a permanent open forum for the interaction of the sacred and the secular.

Footnotes to Chapter III

1. There are several comparative works on the divinity of kings in various civilizations. A few of them are listed below :

   John Weir Perry, *Lord of the Four Quarters*, George Brazilien, New York, 1966.

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H. Hookes (ed.); *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1958.

La Regalita Sacra, Report of the History of Religions Conference, (Rome 1959) E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1959.

Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1967.

J.G. Frazer, *The Magical Origin of Kings*, Dawsons of Pall Mall, London, 1968.

Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, University of Chicago Press, 1967.

2. The wider prevalence of the idea of divine Kingship may be partly due to (*i*) its earlier formulation in Mesopotamia and Egypt and its spread therefrom to Europe and (*ii*) to the greater utility of the idea in maintaining social order in an established monarchy.

3. G. Coedes, *Angkor, An Introduction*, 2nd edition; Hong Kong 1966, and G. Coedes, *Les Etats Hindouise's d'Indochine et d'Indonesie*, Paris 1948.

4. Most of these criticisms are summed up in a paper awaiting publication : Hermann Kulke, (of Sudasien Institute, Heidelberg University), "The Devaraja Cult, A Reassessment of the Evidence."

5. K.M. Panikkar in his Munshi memorial lecture at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, explains how European scholars automatically projected the idea of Persian despotism onto India and the rest of Asia.

6. *Fg.* 1 A.S. Altekar points out how Jayaswal reads too much into the Ramayana episode of Dasaratha consulting his Council before Rama's proposed coronation. See also my comments on the exaggerated attention given to ancient republics in V. Subramaniam, "Ancient Indian Republics and Modern Democracy" *The Statesman*, New Delhi, February 1967.

7. *Manusmriti*, VII, 3-5. This verse is explained at length in Gonda's paper in *La Regalita Sacra*.

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Earlier Vedic hymns refer to this in their sacrificial chants. It is repeated in the Santiparva of Mahabharata.

8. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1956, p. 89.

9. Kautilya clearly elevates Political Science as the greatest of sciences and attributes the full power of law to the King's command. Indeed in Chapter 10, Book I, Kautilya advises the King to test his ministers against religious allurement—*i.e.*, greater loyalty to Dharma than to the king. For more details and references see V. Subramaniam, "Tamil Contribution to Hindu Political Thought", Indian Journal of *Public Administration*, New Delhi, Vol. XV, No. 2.

10. Kautilya advises that a Brahmin priest be used to spread a false rumour about the king violating some ritual code and test the ministers thereby against 'religious allurement'.

11. Sri Aurobindo, *Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, 1947, pp. 11-13. See also P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, particularly Vol. III for the relation of Dharma to Rajaniti.

12. See R. Gopalan, *The Pallavas of Kanchi* and the earlier work of Krishnaswamy Iyengar. See also Dirks' article in the *Indian Journal of Economic and Social History*, 1976. If the Pallavas were tribals outside the pole of Tamil Culture, then their legitimization through Brahman ritual was needed to give them royal status.

13. King Janaka is the best exemplar in the Upanishads of superior royal wisdom. See also the story of how Ajatasatru, King of Kasi taught the Brahmin Balaki, knowledge of Brahman in *Brihadaranyakopanishad* and how the Pancala King taught Brahmin Gotama in *Chandogyopanishad*.

14. Salya tells the story of Indra and Nahusha to the Pandavas to reassure them before the war that evil and arrogant kings will ultimately go to rack and ruin. See C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata* Bharatiya Vidya Bahavan, Bombay.

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15. The actual curse was terrible. Because Indra was so lustful for the sage's wife, his body was covered with a thousand vaginas. Later it was changed to a thousand eyes.

16. *Skanda Purana*. The earlier part describes the defeat and imprisonment of Devas and this is attributed to Sage Durvasa's curse.

17. The Prahlada story in later times became a story of the power of devotion rather than a warning to arrogant kings assuming divinity. Finally in Tyagaraja's *Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam*, even the man-lion incarnation was omitted. Yet one can see its other meaning in Kamban's handling of the story in his Ramayana, where it is told to arrogant King Ravana.

18. Herman Kulke, *op. cit.*, has brought out this confrontation clearly.

19. I have discussed this in some detail in Chapter II, "The Exhaustion of the earlier synthesis and the decline of the Political Realm" of my book *Cultural Integration in India*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979.

20. Neither Alwar refers to *Pancaratra Agama* in his poems directly. But Perialwar's description of what he does in, and what he receives from, the temple in his *Tiruppallandu* clearly indicates temple service as a full time occupation for him.

21. The *Thanian i.e.*, introductory Sanskrit verse for *Tiruppalli eluchi* uses the phrase "*Rajavatarhaniyam*" meaning "to be worshipped like a King". The mention of thousands of attendants waiting for the Lord to wake up is again a clear indication of regal splendour.

22. Walter G. Neevel Jr., *Yamuna's Vedanta and Pancaratra : Integrating the Classical and the Popular*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 10, Scholars Press, 1977.

Yamuna explains that the temple priests are full-blooded Brahmins following their own Grihya Sutra of the Vajasaneya group.

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23. This is first referred to by Panini, say of the 4th century B.C. For further details about the development see J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi (2nd ed.,) 1969.

24. The ongoing work of Walter G. Neevel comparing the Buddhist and Hindu concepts of the "descending saviour" suggests that the concept took quite long to reach its final shape till after the 4th century.

25. *Tirukkural* has one verse which says that "The King who protects (his subjects) according to law and equity will be deemed a God to them"—and this is counterbalanced by another verse saying "The exactions of a sceptre-holder are no better than the threats of a dacoit." The respect for the King is thus absolutely conditional on good behaviour.

26. Dr. M. Varadarajan explained this in some detail with verses from Sangam poetry in an article in an *Ananda Vikatan* special number in 1967. Those who challenged it at the International Tamil Studies Conference in January 1968 could produce only a few instances, which I feel do not affect his main thesis.

27. In one reference, Nannan enforces the letter of the law by executing a poor girl who stole a mango from the royal grove. In another he is portrayed as letting down an ally to whom he promised help. He is simply 'boycotted' by poets. His sins while crude are not unusual among crowned heads. The Puranas usually portray arrogance and lust as greater sins—and the punishment is also greater.

28. The references are given in the standard Tamil form namely to (*a*) title of the poetic work, Chapter and verse for the *Divyaprabhandam* and (*b*) to the Sthala or town for the *Devarams*.

29. F.E. Hardy *Emotional Krsnabhakti*, D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1976.

30. For translated extracts of these, see Appendix II to V. Subramaniam, *Cultural Integration in India*, Ashish P.H., New Delhi, 1979.

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31. Sage Lomesa takes the Pandavas in exile to several bathing places and tells them the legends associated with each in the Vana parva. There is no mention of deities in temples.

32. Scholars have entered some caveats about identifying the Pallava monarch Mahendravarman as the would-be persecutor. The poem quoted refers to the Lord of the South, and can be taken to refer to the Pallava King who was the most powerful King in the South.

33. Thiru V. Kalyana Sundara Mudaliar, a nationalist Tamil scholar, was the editor of *Desabhaktan* during the first Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920 and when the Government of Madras demanded security from him regarding publication of anti-government comments, he refused to pay and announced this on the front page with the caption (from Appar's song) Namarkum Kudi Allom!

34. V. Subramaniam, *Cultural Integration in India*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, Chap. III.

35. He is referred to obliquely as the wearer of the *margosa leaf garland.*

36. A well-known verse on the Pandya King from the work *Muttollayiram* illustrates this clearly :

Dazzling pearls of splendour
Not only do (your) pearl-banks at Korkai produce
Pearl-like tears are produced
Also by the eyes of young maidens
Captivated by the broad chest with sandalpaste
Of (you) the Pandya King of the bloody victorious spear.

37. Karaikkal's *Mootha Tiruppadigam* had definitely sacralized dancing—through association with Lord Siva—by the 6th century, if we accept Kamil Zvelebil's date. *Silappadikaram* (of the 7-8th centuries according to Vyapuri Pillai) goes further by describing *all* Gods as having danced different dances : *e.g.*, Tirumal-Pandarangam; Kaman-Pedi, and Siva—Kodukotti. In addition, the dance of

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milkmaids (Aychiar Kuravai) is danced in honour of Krishna.

38. See chapter on Devadasis by Anne-Marie Gaston.

39. For the defence of the Sri Rangam temple by the devotees and the escape of Vedanta Desika by hiding under the corpses, see K.A. Nilakata Sastri, *History of South India.*

40. The practice of Rajopachara including music and dance was probably going on for some time before it was formalized in the Agamas in detail and also included in later classics on dance. I am giving some details based on two articles by T.G. Subramaniam in *Kamakoti Pradeepam* Madras, September and October, 1973. Thus, the Saivite *Suprabhedagama* and the Vaishnavite *Sriprasna Samhita* give details of the order in which they need to proceed when the utsava image is taken out on festive occasions :

तदग्रे रुद्रगणिकाः सर्वालंकारसंयुताः ।
तदन्ते गायकाः प्रोक्ताः तदन्ते नर्तकाः व्रजेत् ॥
(Suprabheda)

Bedecked dancing girls in front; the singers trailing behind and the male dancers further behind :

राजोचितैः परिजनैरन्य वाद्यगणैस्सह ।
नवयौवनसंपन्ना रत्नभूषणभूषिताः ॥
नर्तक्योंऽभिनयन्त्यो वै श्रृंगारादिरसान् बहून ।
गायन्त्यः सुस्वराः सर्वा वाद्यैश्व विविधैरपि ॥
(Sriprasna)

The Lord's image is surrounded by a royal entourage and musical instruments ; bedecked in jewels, young dancing maids interpret Srungara and other Rasas and all singing mellifluously accompanied by several musical instruments.

Such a procession in Sri Rangam is also described as an eyewitness account by Saint Tyagaraja in his song "Raju Vedale."

The Suprabhedagama also describes the dress and make up of the dancers and the good results of festive dancing.

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Much of this detail was also taken over and included in the later dance classic *Bharatarnava.*

41. For the contribution of Ramaswamy Dikshitar to the Tirvarur temple festival schedule, see P. Sambamurthy, *Great Composers*, Madras, Book II.

42. The Indian classics on dance can describe Mudras, Karanas and Abhinaya only verbally and they were not illustrated usually. For actual dance poses, one learnt them from the traditional teachers. Temple sculptors did a great service by portraying all dance poses in such famous temples as Belur and Chidambaram. All these sculptures, were done after the firm establishment of the King-God concept.

43. *Tirukkailaya Gnana Ula* on Lord Siva was among the earliest. There were probably Ulas on contemporary Chola monarchs which have been lost. The earliest Ula on a King available now is on Kulottunga I.

44. Somewhat earlier to the Kuravanji, King Shaji of Tanjore created a genre *Pallaki Seva Prabhandam*, involving the procession in the palanquin of Lord Tyagaraja of Tirvarur to meet his consort Parvati. But this genre did not strike root and was superseded by the Kuravanji.

45. The Kuravanji is very flexible, admitting lighter dancing by the gypsy and the prediction of future events by her enlarges the scope of the story. For example the Sujata story is too simple and small ; she sees the unconscious Buddha, offers him milk and revives him. I introduced a gypsy first to predict that Sujata who is craving for a male child will have one, if she spots Buddha and revives him. After he is revived, the gypsy foretells Buddha's glorious future and the more glorious career of Buddhism. See V. Subramaniam, *Panca Kanya Tarangini*, Bangalore 1975.

46. The Varnam starts with a declaration of love, pangs of separation, and may be hope of union, with a Deity or a King, and then describes his beauty, romantic nature, prowess, wealth, etc. Technically the romantic or Srungara is called the

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basic or Sthayi Bhava and the others such as the heroic or fearful as branching or Sanchari Bhava.

47. Muthuswamy Dikshitar as a Brahmin ritualist and Tantric, starts the Varnam almost with a paraphrase of the opening passage of *Maha Rudram* describing the angry and awesome Rudra.

48. Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1973, and Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1959 ;

Both trace the influence of the King God idea on the Jews and American Puritans respectively in making them critical and independent. Neither has anything to say on art.

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CHAPTER IV

THE *RASA* THEORY : THEOLOGY OR AESTHETICS ?

—Prof. V.K. CHARI

In his influential book *The Transformation of Nature in Art*,[1] Ananda Coomaraswamy argues for a close affinity between theology and aesthetics, and expounding the Rasa theory in the light of Meister Eckhart's view of art, he reads many parallels between Hindu aesthetics and the Christian mystical conceptions. For him art is a symbolic representation of the invisible divine essence and hence it subserves a religious function. The corporeal form—the icon—is a symbolization of the incorporeal ; "Form is a revelation of essence," as Eckhart said (p. 72). Coomaraswamy puts it thus : "Art is religion, religion art, not related, but the same" (p. 62). Beauty, then, becomes valuable only in a religious context, as a handmaid to worship. He denounces the modern cult of aestheticism as a form of desecration in which "the worshipper, who naturally regards the icon as a devotional utility, comes to regard it as a mere work of art, for its "aesthetic surfaces and sensations." The true worshipper, on the other hand, "is nearer to the root of the matter than the aesthetician who endeavours to isolate beauty from function" (p. 169). Coomaraswamy's aesthetic mysticism not only leads him to equate art and religion, but

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to elevate the religious value above the purely aesthetic. He asserts that "even the mis-shapen image of an angel is to be preferred to that of a man, however, attractive the latter may be" (p. 167). Coomaraswamy reads the Rasa theory in the light of this Revelatory Theory and concludes that Rasa is essentially a spiritualistic concept having to do with the revelation of Brahman.

Coomaraswamy sounds authoritative in dealing with *Sukranitisara* and the esoteric symbolism of Hindu religious iconography. But his account of the Sanskrit poetic theory often becomes tendentious and overlaid with theological terminology. I hope to show that the Sanskrit critics themselves, in spite of their personal theological affiliations, were careful enough not to confuse poetic matters with theological issues. True that literary theories in Sanskrit have been readily absorbed into scholastic discussions and have consequently become tinged with the doctrines of the various schools of Indian philosophy. Thus Mimamsa, Nyaya, Samkhya, and Vedanta have lent their vocabulary, concepts, and modes of reasoning to critical discourse. But it is equally well known that the Sanskrit writers, right from the beginning of critical speculation in India, have had a great stake in maintaining the uniqueness of poetic discourse and its distinction from all other modes—from metaphysical thought, from logic, from religious experience, and from scriptural injunctions. In fact, the study of literature (*Alamkarasastra)* in Sanskrit arose as a rival discipline to the various philosophical traditions (*darsanas*). If, however, these, critics sometimes seem to be advancing particular scholastic doctrines and to adopt their language, they at no time depart from the view that literature represents a unique realm of experience and that it has no end or utility beyond the delight it yields, and requires no laws outside of those that derive from its own nature as art.

That for the Sanskrit critics literature was an independent realm and not subservient to the scriptures may be

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gathered from Bharata's classic the *Natyasastra*. The very fact that Brahma, the creator of the Four Vedas, had himself demonstrated the science of dramaturgy (*brahmana yad udahrtam*) gives it a status independent of the scriptures. Brahma created drama as a substitute for the Vedas (*aparam veda*), incorporating into it the quintessential wisdom of the scriptures, but expressed in a manner that appeals to the whole of human nature and to people of different dispositions. The *natyaveda* does not, of course, run counter to the wisdom imparted by the Vedas ; but its aim is not to enjoin specific duties or to convey truth. It is primarily to provide diversion (*vinodajananam*). The gods wanted something to entertain them (*kridaniyakam icchamah*, *N.S.*, I, 11). Bharata, no doubt, allows for the inculcation of *dharma* or the knowledge of good and evil, and of the other purposes of life like wealth and pleasure (*trivargavyutpatti*). But nowhere does he state that drama is a means to salvation (*moksasadhanam*). On the other hand, one gets the impression that Bharata's main emphasis is the fullest realization and enrichment of man's wordly life, rather than on any other—worldly aims.[2] As Abhinavagupta explains, the *natyaveda* is not to be understood solely as providing a means to the realization of the ultimate goal of life, namely, *moksa*, because it deals with all matters pertaining to art treated in the *sastras*.[3] Bharata himself goes so far as to say that the art of dance (and one might add music too) does not purport to serve the realization of the *Purusarthas* because it has been created for no other reason than that it is beautiful and gives pleasure (*N.S.*, IV, 266-68). And in a statement which orthodox Hindus might find blasphemous, he declares that "music and singing are more holy and beneficial than thousands of religious baths and incantations" (*N.S.*, XXXVI, 26). Bharata's aim is thus to establish for the stage arts a status of independence, and his book, accordingly, is mainly concerned with the aesthetics of these arts, rather than with their theological or other implications.

Such a purely secular view of the dramatic art might

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seem inconsistent with the ritualistic setting in which Bharata's theatre appears : invocations, *puja*, and all the rest that goes into the ceremony of *Purvaranga* (ceremony before the actual performance). True also that Bharata himself, and Abhinavagupta, as well as the later writers, accept moral inculcation (*upadesa, vyutpatti*) as one of the aims of drama. Often it appears that *kavya* (poetry) for them is simply a more agreeable and persuasive way than the Vedas and the Puranas of instructing the reader in ethical conduct—a kind of sugar-coated pill *gudadracchannakutikausadhakalpam*). The emphasis, thus, seems equally divided between pleasure and instruction (*priti* and *vyutpatti*). And this is consistent with the view of Bharata and Abhinavagupta that drama itself is Veda (*natya meva vedam* : *Abhi. Bha.* I, p. 22). But, despite the equivocation, these writers seem to be clear on two points. First, although both pleasure and instruction, or, more accurately, instruction through pleasure, are aimed at, pleasure alone is the ultimate end of literature, because even the instruction of the Four Purposes of Life (*Purusarthas*) results only in aesthetic delight.[4] Therefore, Abhinavagupta declares : "It cannot be said that the reader is instructed by drama," for that is more properly the function of the Dharma Sastras (works on ethics).[5] Accordingly, he insists that poetry is meant to be contemplated for its own delight ; delight or *rasasvada* is the immediate as well as the ultimate aim of poetry, the inculcation of *dharma* being at best a secondary aim and not of its essence.[6] Again, Abhinavagupta points out that Shiva's cosmic dance has no purpose other than the expression of his own spontaneous joy (*itikartavyantaravaikalyat*) ; poetic expression too is of this kind (*Abhi. Bha.*, I, 9, 80).

The second point that both Bharata and Abhinavagupta stress is that even if instruction might be the aim, drama differs from the scriptures and moral treatises in its nature and mode of operation. Since drama is concerned with the delineation of human emotions, the *Purusarthas* that it

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might inculcate are treated only through their appropriate mental states, experientially, that is, and not in the way of instruction. As, in Bharata's own words, drama is "a representation of the emotional states of the three worlds" (*trailokyasyasya natyam bhavanukirtanam*, *N.S.*, I, 107), its aim is not directly to convey moral or spiritual truths, but to evoke moods. To put it differently, the verities of man's moral nature, which it is the purpose of all literature to express, once they are presented in the context of a dramatic situation, cease to be instructive or informative merely, but take on the form and substance of dramatic emotions and generate appropriate attitudes in the reader (*samajika*). The Rasa theory of Bharata insists that there is no element in drama, no idea, theme, or image that does not serve an evocative function, by being absorbed into the emotive situation. Hence *vyutpatti* or knowledge as such has no independent play in drama ; it invariably becomes transformed into a function of *rasa*. Thus, if the theme of a play is Dharma or Artha, the mood aroused could be heroic enthusiasm. If it is Kama the erotic sentiment would be suggested ; if Moksa the mood of Quietude (Santa). Thus the four Purusarthas, when they are presented in the form of human action, and not merely expounded as a moral lesson, become indicators (*sucakas*) of one or other of the emotional states according to the nature of the treatment (*Abhi. Bha.*, I, p. 129). *Abhinayana* or dramatic representation, consisting of speech, gesture, etc. is so called because it "leads" towards *rasa* (*rasabhimukhyanayana* : *Abhi. Bha.*, I, p. 150). And it is distinct in its method from logical reasoning or verbal testimony because of its presentational immediacy (*pratyaksavyaparakalpam*, *saksatkararupam*). The apprehension of poetry, too, is distinct from the mere cognitive process in that it does not contemplate meanings in a neutral frame of mind (*tatasthyena*), but as something that is relished (*asvadya*, *bhogya*). Contemplation of poetic meanings is itself a form of relishine (*rasana*). Poetic meanings arouse in us affective responses ; hence they are called *bhavakas* as they cause the *rasa*-experience in us

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(*kavyam bhavakam rasan bhavayati iti* : Locana, p. 200), by speaking directly to our hearts (*hrdayanupravesena*). Words in literature have, no doubt, to be understood as conventional signs (*samketa*) and their message interpreted through logical construction. But the reading process does not rest or terminate in the mere understanding of the verbal message ; it must eventuate in a sympathetic response to the message conveyed. Thus poetic meanings are relished even while they are cognized (*pratityaiva rasyante*, Locana, p. 200). It is for this reason that Bhattanayaka insisted that cognitive understanding and knowledge of the Four Purposes (*Caturvargas*) are relatively unimportant in poetry (*vyutpattir nama apradhanameva :* (Locana, p. 193). . Following Bhattanayaka, Abhinavagupta asserts that in poetry knowledge is not completely different from pleasure, because both have the same object (*dvayorapyekavisayatvat*). They both result from the same cause—the causes and consequences of an emotive situation ((*vibhavadi*). Delight itself is poetry's way of knowing, and hence it is said that *Natya* (drama) itself is Veda (Locana, p. 369).

Thus, the doctrine of *rasas* or dramatic emotions, as originally enunciated by Bharata and expounded at length by Abhinavagupta, takes its stand squarely on the material, instinctual nature of man. *Kavya* (poesy) is simply a dramatization of human emotions and is of the form of pleasure and pain (*sukhaduhkhasvarupatmaka*), although, as Abhinavagupta would insist, aesthetic experience is finally a pleasurable one. It is not a transcendental meditation on the attributeless Absolute (*nirgunabrahman*). In fact, Abhinavagupta affirms that poetic experience is a *savikalpaka* (qualified or conditioned), not a *nirvikalpaka* (unconditioned), mode of knowledge, and that it is distinct from Yogic perception of the other (*parasamvitti*), because the latter is neutral (*tatastha*) and devoid of all passion (*viraga, sakalavaisikoparagasunya* : *Abhi. Bha.*, VI, p. 670 ; Locana, p. 165). How can the Yogis who are averse to all worldly things experience the thrill of drama (*Abhi. Bha* , I, p 81) ?

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Therefore, *rasa*-experience is a form of conditioned knowledge or reflective understanding (*anuvyavasaya*), tinctured (*rusita*) by mental states (*cittavrttis*) like pleasure and pain, which are directly apprehended by our emotional nature.[7]

There were, of course, attempts made in some quarters to give a metaphysical twist to Bharata's Rasa theory. Bhattanayaka, under the inspiration of Samkhya and Vedanta, attempted to "spiritualize" aesthctic experience in describing it as a blissful state of mind characterized by a melting, expansion, or illumination of consciousness, owing to the suppression of the qualities of *rajas* (passion, energy) and *tamas* (stupor), and the dominance of *sattva* (the luminous principle). This delectable experience he likens to the enjoyment of Brahman (*Abhi. Bha.*, VI, p. 645). Again, although Bhattanayaka recognized that the way of poesy was not the way of knowledge, he still thought of drama as a means to the realization of the highest goal of life, namely, spiritual emancipation (*moksa*). For him, the illusory world of drama illustrates the illusoriness of the created universe itself. It inculcates the lesson that the world of names and forms (*namarupa*) is an insubstantial shadow, fabricated by the mind through ignorance (*avidya*), and hence that the enlightened self must liberate itself from it (*Abhi. Bha.*, I pp. 24-26). This metaphysical function that Bhattanayaka assigns to drama leads him to the conclusion that the aesthetic state is essentially a quietistic condition of the mind, and that all other dramatic emotions originate as well as terminate in the Santa Rasa (the mood of subsidence or serenity) : Santa is the ultimate *rasa* (*Abhi. Bha.*, I, p. 26). But, as Abhinavagupta insists, this state of reposeful self-immersion, which is *rasa*, is still an experiential condition and distinct from the detached, albeit blissful, state of gnosis attained by Yogis. Bhattanayaka seems to concede as much when he says that the aesthetic contemplation is an "excited" state of mind (*sattvodrekaprakasanandamaya* : *Abhi. Bha.*, VI, p. 645), although as a *sattvic* condition it is purged of all perturbations due to the subsidence of *rajas* and *atmas*.

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Much the same argument is advanced by Abhinavagupta and others in favour of Santa Rasa as a ninth *rasa*.[8] In spite of the fact that the discussion of this subject has often been given a theological complexion, especially by later day commentators like Vedantadesika (Raghavan, pp. 53-54), Santa is not to be understood as a total cessation of all feelings and mental activities, but as a basic emotion (*sthayi bhava*). Abhinavagupta rejects the view that the basis of Santa is the subsidence of all mental states. "This," he writes, "is a false notion. If all mental states were to cease there would be no *bhavatva* (emotionality)." and therefore, Santa would not be a Rasa (Raghavan, p. 73). Equally objectionable would be the view that because Santa is not a mental state, being a cessation of all modifications (*santasya nirvikaratvat*), it is not to be admitted as a Rasa at all (Raghavan, p. 26). In opposition to this view, it has been argued that Santa or Sama (repose) is a basic mental state and hence that it can be adequately dramatized in poetry or on the stage as an action or movement reaching towards that mood, as the final end or climax (*paryantabhumi*) of a sequence of situational factors (*vibhavadi*), or, in a minor way, as a transitory state (*vyabhicaribhava*) accompanying other dominant emotions (*sthayins*), or sometimes even as the theme of a subsidiary plot (*prasangikarasa*).

Aesthetic matters further become involved in theological speculations at the hands of the Vaisnava Alamkarikas of Bengal—Bopadeva, Rupagoswami, and Madhusudhana Saraswati. Even as men like Bhattanayaka gave the Rasa theory the stamp of Vedanta and Samkhya, these writers attempted to reinterpret Bharata's aesthetics in the light of the Vaisnava philosophy of Bhakti. Santa now is replaced by Bhakti as the primal Rasa, with its major divisions of Santa, Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya, and Madhura, with Maya Rasa sometimes superadded, and the original eight Rasas of Bharata are relegated to a secondary position as *Gaunabhakti Rasas*. Theology, at this point, seems to take entire

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possession of aesthetics, all human attitudes being reduced to attitudes towards the Lord. Rati or the erotic sentiment is no longer an emotion inspired by man-woman relationship, but becomes an aspect of god-relation (*devadivisaya ratih*). When Madhusudhana Saraswati defines *bhakti* as "the assumption by the mind of the form of the Lord" (*bhagavad akarata*) and suggests this to be the basic state (*sthayin*) of the all-embracing Bhakti Rasa, aesthetic experience itself becomes an adjunct of god-realization, and we seem to be entering the world of Coomaraswamy and Meister Eckhart. But, luckily for Sanskrit poetics, this school of opinion was no more than a minor aberration in the wide field of critical speculation in India. The main development of Sanskrit poetics proceeded along the lines set by the classical writers from Bharata down. From the point of view of the classical theory, one can reply to the theologians by saying that the religious emotion, call it *bhakti* or *preman*, is still an emotion and a constituent of man's psychic nature, and therefore, all expression of it in poetry takes on the fundamental character of a dramatic emotion (*rasa*) and is represented as such. All emotions and attitudes become the subject-matter of Rasa (*rasavisaya*) when they are treated in art, and all *Kavya* is *Rasakavya*. We have certainly no objection to the treatment of the religious emotion in literature and we are not trying to rule out of court the great religious poetry of which there is an impressive amount both in Sanskrit and elsewhere in world literature. Our theory of Rasa encompasses the whole gamut of human experience, and it certainly provides the religious emotion too its rightful place in aesthetic expression.

The attempt to apply Hindu transcendental theories to aesthetic criticism is also seen in Abhinavagupta's definition of Rasa as a supra-mundane (*alaukika*) experience. Rasa apprehension (*rasapratiti*), according to him, is quite distinct from ordinary modes of knowledge like direct perception, inference, or recollection. It is a form of cognition, no doubt, but cognition which consists of relishing. Aesthetic

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experience is, again, "a mass of delight" (*anandaghana*) comparable to the enjoyment of Brahman (*brahmasvadasahodarah*). It is not produced in the way natural effects are produced by their causes ; and it is essentially a state in which the mind feels emancipated from all mental and affective barriers (*bhagnavarana*). This theory, which we may call *Rasabrahmavada*, originally enunciated by Bhattanayaka and adopted by Abhinavagupta with modifications, becomes the standard explanation of Rasa in the manuals on poetics. Its obvious affinities to Vedantic mysticism must have led Coomaraswamy to identify the Rasa theory with Hindu metaphysics. Coomaraswamy writes in *The Dance of Shiva*:

> The theory of *rasa* set forth according to Viswanatha and other aestheticians belongs to totalistic monism. The doctrine of the universal presence of reality is that of the immanence of the Absolute. It is inconsistent with a view of the world as absolute *maya*, or utterly unreal, but it implies that through the false world experience may be seen by those of penetrating vision (artists, lovers and philosophers) glimpses of the real substrate.[9]

Coomarasway is not alone in connecting the Rasa theory with metaphysics. Professor Pandey, in his volume on Indian aesthetics, reads Abhinavagupta's theories in the light of Kashmir Saivism.[10] He observes that in Abhinavagupta's transcendental view aesthetic contemplation becomes a form of meditation on the Self itself, in which, with all objective reference suspended and the aesthetic object disappearing from view, the Self rests in his own luminous consciousness. The art-object becomes thus a mere focus for meditation. Rasa the experience of the Self itself as pure and unmixed bliss.[11]

Abhinavagupta's language, no doubt, lends itself readily to this kind of interpretation. The influence of the metaphysical doctrines is also there unquestionably. But, despite

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the transcendental vocabulary, neither Abhinavagupta nor Viswanatha actually seek to subsume aesthetics under theology or illuminist metaphysics of one brand or other. Again, although these critics tend to describe aesthetic experience in absolutist terms they never fail to seek validation for their theories at the phenomenological level. The conception of Rasa as transcendental can thus be accounted for in terms of aesthetic psychology. The key-word in its explanation is *sadharanikarana* or the "generalizing process" —a notion originally propounded by Bhattanayaka. The emotions represented in poetry strike a sympathetic chord in our hearts owing to the generalizing power of the mental states, psychic impressions (*samskaras*, *vasanas*) being elemental by hypothesis and common to all human beings. The peculiar characteristic of poetic response is that things that are seen to be happening in the world of the poem or drama are apprehended without the sense that they are happening to others, not to oneself, or to oneself only and not to others.[12] It is the peculiar magic of poetic representation that it compels in us a form of identification with the represented emotions that is neither other-directed (*paragata*) nor entirely directed towards oneself (*svagata*). Thus the mind is enabled to contemplate the situation at once with involvement and detachment. In the mundane context we either become too involved or remain neutral; at any rate we derive no pleasure from life-emotions. Hence it is stated that aesthetic enjoyment is made possible by the removal of "the mass of egotism and passion" (Locana, p. 200) and of the distracting medium of practical purposes (*arthakriya*). Rasa is an expansive, enlightened state of mind, and what is meant by comparing *rasasvada* to *brahmasvada* is that both conditions are of the same order and cultivated for their own unique kind of delight, and not that they are identical.[13]

Another aspect of its transcendent character is that Rasa-perception is not limited by the sense of time, distance, or region. Events are apprehended as though they were

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happening here and now. Again, although Rasa necessarily arises in a poetic context, from the contemplation of the represented situation, it is not generated by that situation, but simply awakened into consciousness. The human mind is a storehouse of all kinds of memories and impressions (perhaps also prenatal and genetically inherited), and the basic emotions (*sthayins*) are already embedded in man's psychic make-up. Thus, if Srngara or the erotic feeling is not already present in the reader's mind, he will not derive any pleasure from a dramatic representation of it (*e.g.*, children and Yogis), although an adult person might still recognize the situation in terms of its outward signs. But no sympathetic vibration of the heart (*hrdayasamvada*) would result from such a recognition. It is in this sense that the aesthetic object is understood to be a "medium," not so much the "object" of aesthetic experience. What is contemplated is not strictly the objective scene as given, but our own emotions which it serves to manifest and awaken. All this might sound like an occult matter. But it is an empirical fact of aesthetic consciousness. It is also argued by our critics that although the dramatized human situation is what occasions the aesthetic response there is no clear cause-and-effect relationship between the two. Rasa is perceived simultaneously with the exciting agencies, and not as an effect ensuing from them.[14] Hence the knowledge of the Rasa is identical with the knowledge of the emotive situation. Besides, unlike effects in the ordinary world which continue even after their causes have dissipated, Rasa lasts only for the duration of the situational factors; when they are absent the emotion too ceases to exist. The presented emotive situation, then, is neither one that produces the Rasa (*karaka*) nor one that causes the knowledge of it (*jnapaka*). Another reason why the world of poetry may be characterized as transcendental is that from all occurrences in this world pleasure alone results invariably, whereas in the actual world from the causes of sorrow, fear, disgust, etc. only sorrow, fear, disgust, etc. would result. In poetry even pain is taken as pleasure (*duhkhamapi sukhatvena bhimanyate*).

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But this is not to say that Rasa is eternal like Brahman or incomprehensible, because it is made available to us through the medium of words (*sabdasambhavat*) and is known by the responsive reader (*sahrdaya*) in immediate apprehension without the need for any external proof (*svasamvedana-siddhatvat*).

It must, however, be admitted that, in his anxiety to secure for aesthetic experience a unique status, Abhinavagupta needlessly subtilizes the concept of Rasa. His attempt to expatiate on the mysticism of aesthetic enjoyment would seem unnecessary because it does not help the practical business of criticism. In judging the artistic excellence of a work one does not go simply by the effect it produces in the reader, however, intense or beatific that effect may be. But, rather, one should always be able to describe the connection between the work and feeling in such a way that the feeling itself can be shown to be a testable, objective feature of the work. Again, the argument that Rasa is neither caused nor made known, but is self-manifested, etc. seems like a piece of casuistry. In the ultimate analysis perhaps aesthetic experience is something subjective and private, as all experience is. But in the literary context it is something occasioned and what occasions it is the work. Rasa is a product in the sense that it arises only in relation to a formal representation of emotions. This was Bharata's understanding of Rasa-expression (*rasanispatti*). In fact, Viswanatha admits as much when he says : "The Rasa eventually resulting from the union of the emotive conditions (*vibhavadi*) is logically and analytically, if not chronologically and really, subsequent to the exciting agencies."[15] Further, he maks it clear that the possibility of Rasa being apprehended is dependent on the power of verbal representation (*Sahityadarpana*, III, 57).

In point of fact, however, Abhinavagupta's metaphysics, whatever its merits, does not hurt his aesthetics as do

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Coomaraswamy's theological preoccupations. For Abhinavagupta is at no time seen to lose sight of logic and psychology or leave the objective work behind. In his concern with the semantics of poetry and in his eloquent exposition of the concept of *Rasaucitya*, in both of which he is true to the classical tradition of Bharata and Anandavardhana, he secures for his criticism an objective aesthetic basis, which Coomaraswamy's theological aesthetics fails to achieve. For Coomaraswamy offers no other criterion for the evaluation of art than that of a correspondence between the art-object and the artist-worshipper's mental image of the Ideal. Furthermore, his attempt to platonize *Rasa* is apparent when he translates that term as "Ideal Beauty" (*Transformation of Nature*, p. 46). And in stating that "the *rasa* and *dhvani* theories are essentially metaphysical and Vedantic in method and conclusion" he is guilty of distorting the case.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

1. New York, 1956.

2. *Nanavibhutisamyuktam rddhivilasadibhir gunaih*, *Natyasastra*, XX, 11. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text, abbreviated as *N.S.*

3. *Abhinavabharati* in *Natyasastram*, ed. Madhusudhana Sastri (Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi), I, p. 52. Subsequent references to this commentary by Abhinavagupta will appear in the text, abbreviated as *Abhi. Bha.*

4. *tathapi pritireva pradhanam...caturvargavyutpatterapi ca ananda eva paryantikam mukhyam phalam* : "*Locana*," *Dhvanyaloka*, with Hindi commentary, ed. Jagannatha Pathak (Chowkhamba, Varanasi, 1965), I, p. 41.

5. *Nahyanena samajiko viniyate : Abhi. Bha.*, I, p. 36.

6. See also Kuntaka, *Vakroktijivata*, I, 5, Dhanamjaya, *Dasarupaka*, I, 6. Hiriyana, *Art Experience*

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(Mysore, 1954), p. 21, rightly observes : "Indian writers have always clearly discerned the difference (between the attitude evoked by poetry and the results that might ensue from it) and have recognized the reading of poetry as more an end in itself than as a means to something else. This is the underlying truth of the conception of *rasa*."

7. *Tasmad anuvyavasayatmakam anukirtanam rusitavi-kalpasamvedanam natyam : Abhi. Bha.*, I, p. 125.

8. For a comprehensive discussion of Santa Rasa see V. Raghavan, *The Number of Rasa-s* (Madras, 1967), pp. 68-102.

9. New York, 1957, pp. 41-42.

10. *Indian Aesthetics*, Ch. II.

11. *Svatmarupamatih svatmadvarena visvam tatha pasyan: Abhi. Bha.*, I., p. 114.

12. *Parasya na parasyeti, mameti na mameti ca tadasvade vibhavadeh paricchedo na vidyate* : Viswanatha, *Sahityadarpana*, III, p. 43.

13. Hiriyana, p. 25.

14. *Karanajnanatatkaryajnanayoh yugapad darsanat* : *Sahityadarpana*. III, p. 52 : gloss.

15. *The Mirror of Composition* (*Sahityadarpana*), trans, J. R. Ballantyne and P. D. Mitra (Banaras, 1956), p. 46.

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CHAPTER V

THE PLACE OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE IN TRADITIONAL INDIAN CULTURE*

—Anne-Marie Gaston

Ananda Coomaraswamy is, no doubt, best remembered for his introduction to the West of the artistic achievements of India. In his own lifetime he became acknowledged as an art historian who was anxious to go beyond the superficial and educate the West to the art of India which is found not only in the sub-continent but in Sri Lanka and throughout South-East Asia. Just as great Western art has not been produced by amateurs and an appreciation of it has to be cultivated by exposure and knowledge of technique, Coomaraswamy tried to establish that the same criteria must be applied to Indian art. Indeed, Coomaraswamy acknowledges that his translation of the *Abhinayadarpana* (Mirror of Gesture) was the response to a letter from the art critic, Gordon Craig, who knew that texts on the rules of the various classical arts existed, but not in translation. Anxious that standards be established, Craig writes of the need for :

".....A book of technical instruction before men go

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crazy over the lovely dancers of the king of Cambodia, before the 'quaintness' tickles them, before they see a shortcut to sensation."[1]

While the *Abhinayadarpana* is an excellent source for the theory of the dance, another book of his, *The Dance of Siva*, discusses the philosophy. Neither book, however, mentions the actual exponents of the dance as they existed during his time, and he only makes brief and passing reference to the position, these women held. This is unfortunate, because in the early and mid-twentieth century, the dance in India was being attacked by missionaries and puritans amongst the Indian upper classes, who together succeeded in abolishing it in the temples, so that in fact the dance nearly disappeared. No doubt the dancers and possibly their sexual mores were a source of embarrassment to Coomaraswamy in his effort to present Indian arts in terms acceptable to the West.

Perhaps Coomaraswamy believed that Westerners would consider decadent, a system which kept dancing girls for the pleasure of kings and wealthy patrons and as part of temple ritual, but it is difficult to believe that he was unaware of the long history and function of the dance, particularly since most of our information regarding the system as it existed during the beginning of the twentieth century is taken from the Legislative Assembly debates in India of 1922 : re *Prohibition of Traffic in Minor Girls*. Here we learn of its connection with prostitution and of the conflicting views regarding religious sanction. There is, no doubt, however, that dance has always played an important part in recreational and aesthetic life apart from the religious life of India. In the past, dancing girls were found all over India, but this system developed to the fullest in the great temple cities of southern India where the daily ritual surrounding the god came to resemble a royal court. Both kings and god required

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many servants, and in the case of the temples these became known as *devadasis*.

Devadasi literally means 'female slave of god', and includes all other female servants employed for the upkeep of the temple and service to the deity. Though usage, however, the term *devadasi* has become almost exclusively associated with temple dancers, and it is from this tradition that the classical dances performed on the concert stage to-day originally derive. *Devadasis* were found all over India and there are still dancers alive who grew up and were trained in the traditional manner. In the translations of the early inscriptions and literary references, courtesans, prostitutes, public women, harlots and temple dancers have been synonymous, and we shall see that all these interpretations may be correct.

A definition of the term *devadasi* given in the 1901 Madras Census Report probably was a fair indication of the attitude of westernized Indians towards the dance during Coomaraswamy's time : "handmaideni of the gods, (they) are dancing girls attached to the Tamil temples, who subsist by dancing and music and the practice of the oldest profession."[2] Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy speaking in the Madras Legislature at about this time, was also explicit : "Now the appellation (of *devadasi*) as every one of us here knows, whatever the original meaning may have been, now stands for a prostitute. None of us in the south who are too familiar with their customs can dispute the fact."[3] At this time many different regional names were in use for the institution of *devadasi*. Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*,[4] the 1901 Census report of India,[5] and the legislative debates for Feb. 27, 1922[6] are only three of many sources that give regional names for *devadasis* all over India. From these it becomes clear that *devadasis* had both secular and religious functions.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the *devadasi* system was their formal marriage to the god of the temple

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to which they were attached. According to all available records, this ceremony was nearly always performed, whether or not they combined their duties as dancers with those of courtesan and prostitute. The legislative debates of 1922 on the abolition of the *devadasi* system describe the marriage ceremony which was also the ceremony of dedication.

"Above the age of sixteen, the religious tenets prohibit their enrolment. A girl to be dedicated according to the rules observed from time immemorial must be a virgin..... no temple authority would think of dedicating a girl above fourteen."[7] But in the same debate it was also pointed out that there was no scriptural basis for this tradition.[8]

New applicants to the temple authorities were mainly the daughters of *devadasis*. Others were dedicated by parents for religious motives; it was not unknown for parents without children to promise to dedicate their first daughter to the temple.[9] Girls were purchased for this purpose as late as 1912-13 and it is reported that upto Rs. 2000 was paid. In other cases girls were kidnapped and introduced to the profession. The Collectors of Belgaum, Dharwar and Bijapur districts reported a total of 2,623 girls had been "seduced from their homes" for this purpose.[10] Other records on temples record women dedicating themselves.[11] Among some castes, such as a sect of weavers (*Kakatias*) from Kancipuram[12] and a caste of musicians from Coimbatore, (the *Kaikolan*) it was traditional to dedicate one daughter as a *devadasi*.[13]

As soon as a girl was accepted she would register with the temple authorities and start drawing her pay.[14] The Sucindram temple granted her a house.[15] The marriage to the deity (*talikuttu*) took place slightly later on an auspicious day, according to traditional Hindu rites with a sword, drum, dagger, or another *devadasi* dressed as the husband, representing the groom.[16] Once the symbol of marriage, the *botti*, was tied, the *devadasi* could never legally

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marry again,[17] and since the wedding ceremony usually took place at age 6, 8 or 11 years of age, the girls were unable to later revert to the life of an ordinary married woman. Of course, marriage before puberty was common, indeed as the Madras Census Report of 1911 states :

> "In south India, a girl may marry an arrow, or a tree, perhaps to escape the reproach of attaining puberty unmarried. She may marry an idol which generally implies that she becomes a prostitute."[18]

It wasn't marriage at an early age, but the fact that the girls had to devote their services to the temple and to all persons who visited it that prompted government inquiry. After the marriage ceremony the chief dancing master initiated her into the art of dancing.[19] Like the *devadasis*, he too was supported by the temple.

The children of dancing *devadasis* formed the artistic community of singers, dancers and musicians. It was, and is, through these repositories of an oral tradition that we understand how to perform the gestures and instructions enumerated in the texts, because dance as a living art form can only be maintained through practice and imitation. In the absence of a living tradition it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct solely from the texts the type of movement found in Indian dance.

Coomaraswamy was aware that : 'The arts in India are professional and vocational, demanding undivided service'[20] To-day, however, the dance, in particular, the Bharata Natyam style, is no longer restricted to a particular group for whom it was once a vocation, but has largely become an accomplishment for young ladies of reasonably wealthy families. These girls are usually discouraged from adopting dance as a profession and in most cases their dancing careers are terminated at marriage. The dance was performed in both courts and temples, but when it left the

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confines of the temple for the secular stage much of the religious content was maintained, including such rituals as seeking protection from the eight guardians of the quarters and offering obeisance to mother earth.

There has always been ambiguity surrounding the secular and religious components of the dance tradition but the earliest references in the *Rig Veda* and the early law texts such as the *Laws of Manu* and the *Arthasastra* stress the secular function. Descriptions of the dance by early European travellers, particularly the Portuguese, mention both court and temple performances, often by the same girls, emphasizing the difficulty of dividing secular from religious function in India.

Early literary references to dance are also ambiguous about the purpose of the dance. The *Rig Veda* employs a dancing girl as a metaphor when describing dawn,[21] but no attempt is made to link dance with religious activity, nor is there any indication of the disrepute in which dancers were later held. Although this first reference is from a religious text, it is no more than a poetic metaphor, and lends no support to the idea that Indian dance began as religious ritual.

The secular importance of dance is affirmed very early in the *Arthasastra*[22] and the Laws of Manu, which list dance as one of the many accomplishments of a courtesan. However, while Manu deals harshly with them and advises kings : "gamblers, dancers and singers.....let him instantly banish from his town,"[23] his advice seems to have been largely ignored and they were often given a place in society and accorded respect for their accomplishments. One such example is Ambapali, a courtesan during the time of the Buddha, who was considered one of the treasures of the city of Vaisali.[24] Dr. Shortt, a medical officer in Tamil Nadu during the 19th century also observed that the *devadasis* were, in general, far more educated than 'respectable' married women, and looked upon as an acquisition to the town,

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forming the chief magnet of Hindu society, so that a wife considered it honourable for her husband to visit them.[25] These are not isolated examples and the 16th century writer, Domingos Paes describes the privileged social position of the dancers in the court of Vijayanager :

> "These women (are allowed) even to enter the presence of the wives of the king, and they stay with them and eat betel with them, a thing which no other person may do, no matter what his rank may be."[26]

Auboyer writes that dance usually accompanied the toilet of a princess.[27]

The importance of dancers is shown in many of the plays written during the classical period, which often include a dancer as one of the main characters, particularly since a dance recital was considered an essential part of the play.[28] These dramas provide further information about the social position of dancers and courtesans,[29] but they are also important because they describe dance in temples, while the *Arthasastra* and Laws of Manu restrict their discussion of dance to courtesans. Kalidasa (5th century A. D. ?) in his Meghaduta describes temple dancers during the evening worship of Siva at the temple of Mahakala in Ujjain :

> "...the temple girls' cintures tinkling with the dance steps, their hands weary with the yak-tail fans."[30]

The *Puranas* acknowledge the temple dancer as an institutional role synonymous with those of courtesan and prostitute and several *Puranas* recommend dedicating girls to temples.[31]

The *Vamana Purana* indicates the hazards of trying to remain pious while on pilgrimage in the holy city of Benares :

"Where the vedic accents of great Brahmanas mingling

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with the sounds of the girdles of sportive women are transformed into sounds of great sancity."[32]

Dance was not restricted to Hindu temples ; it appears to have been performed in temples of all three indigenous faiths of the sub-continent. An inscription dated 1270 AD at Gaya records dance in a Buddhist shrine :

"Worship is here (offered) three times a day by means of instrumental music in the highest key (*panchama gata*)[33] and Rambha-like (a celestial dancer) *Bhavanis*[34] (dancing girls attached to the temples).....dancing round wonderfully."[35]

Somadeva, the 11th century Kashmiri writer in his *Kathasaritsagara*, tells the story of Isvaravarman, who went to the Hindu temple at Kanchanapura (not to be confused with Kanchipuram in South India) and saw Sundari, a *devadasi* dancing there :

"At the end of the dance he sent a friend there to solicit her, and she bowed and said · "I am highly favoured."[36]

The 11th century Jain reformer, Jinavallabha in his *Sanghapattaka* is concerned that large numbers of dancing girls are distracting the monks in the Jain temples of Rajasthan.[37]

Just as dancers formed part of the court of Indra, the celestial king, it became the custom for kings to have certain ceremonial activities performed by dancers such as holding the royal umbrella, fanning the royal couple with yaktail fans, and being present at certain State occasions such as royal consecrations.[38] Many of the customs continued and Abbe Dubois, a priest working in South India in the 19th century, records that when a king, or distinguished visitor made a formal visit to the temple he should properly be accompanied by a certain number of *devadasis*.[39]

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In the royal courts the king assumed god-like powers and the same ceremony was accorded to him as the God in the temple. In fact, temple ritual was modelled after court ritual and while dancers were important adornments to a court, the royal *devadasis* could be transferred to religious duties or *vice versa*. It is recorded of King Jalauka of Kashmir :

> "A hundred out of his seraglio who had risen to dance (in honour of the god) of the time fixed for dancing and singing he gave out of joy to Jyestharudra, (Siva).[40]

This practice was not restricted to the Hindus : a 12th century inscription records the transfer of a dancing girl from one of the Buddhist 'temples' (stupa or cave) at Salonapura to the harem of local king.[41]

In Tamil Nadu, Rajendra Cola ruled from Tanjore ; under his orders four hundred temple dancers were brought from nearby temples to be attached to the Brhadisvara temple at Tanjore. The inscription that records the event is important as it names all the temples, both Saiva and Vaisnava that had dancers attached to them.[42] No doubt, Rajaraja's centralizing of the dance tradition around his temple and court made Tanjore a focus of culture in South India and it was this early patronage of the Cola kings that led to the standardization of the Bharata Natyam form of dance as it is known to-day.[43]

Without patronage, either by rulers or temples, the professional dancing class (*devadasis*), which included teachers, (*nattuvans*) and musicians, could not have developed the art to the high standard that it achieved. From the time of the Cilappatikaram (4-6 century A.D.)[44] in which Madavi, the dancer and courtesan receives a garland from the king after her first public peformance,[45] there are numerous references to dancers receiving royal recognition for their excellence. The Cola King, Vira Rajendra I (1063-70) :[46]

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"ordered some land at Tiruvorriyur to be reclaimed and the produce used for services in the temples including .....maintenance.....of dancing masters and girls."[47]

Kings seem to have been generous in their support and records of their generosity can be found in inscriptions. Aditya II (10th century)[48] gave land for a dance performance during Tai Pusam, and three dances to take place beginning the day after the festival of Vaigasi Tiruvadirai, for which the dancer was to receive some paddy.[49] Rajendra Cola Deva (1012-44)[50] and Vikrama Cola (1118-35)[51] also gave some land to support the cost of dance recitals at certain festivals.[52]

Some kings did not limit their encouragement to professional dancers but encouraged their own royal ladies, who were of high birth, to learn dance. No doubt, they studied it to give them grace in deportment and performed it for their own entertainment as well as that of other courtiers. Perhaps the standards of the dance altered when it was thus performed by amateurs. One of the Portuguese travellers who visited Vijayanager during the reign of Acutya Raya records that the royal ladies of Vijayanagar were taught dance.[53] Two other Portuguese travellers, Nuniz and Pietro della Valle (1623-4), record seeing dance; and it is stick dance described by della Valle, which he saw being performed at Takeri near Dharwar,[54] that is illustrated on many of the sculptural friezes at Vijayanagar, particularly on the base of the king's throne.[55] (This stick dance is still done to-day in South India).[56] Krishna Deva Raya, Acutya's son, had a dance hall built in his palace[57] but it does not survive.

The *devadasis* as independent economic agents were not part of a man's household, and many of them became wealthy in their own right. It was not unusual for these women to own their own houses and lands, which were

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often given by them by the temple to which they were attached. However, while the *devadasis* were rewarded by land, food and privileges for their services, they too contributed generously to religious institutions. This practice was in accordance with the *Kamasutra*, which stated that money gained by courtesans should be used :

> ".....to construct temples, tanks, gardens..... and other religious gifts."[58]

Queens were not the only women who enjoyed economic independence. A Canarese inscription on the Mahakutesvara temple at Mahakut near Badami, during the time of the Calukyan King, Vijayaditya (696-743 A.D.) records :

> "Hail ! The heart's darling of Vijayaditya-Satyasraya,... the harlot Vinopati...having at this very place bestowed the entire gift of a *hiranyagarbha* and having set up its silver umbrella.....may he who destroys this grant be guilty of the five sins."[59]

A Telegu inscription dated 1053 A.D. mentions Kasadi Suramadevi, a concubine of the Kota chief, Ketaraja, giving some money to keep a lamp burning in the temple of Ramesvara of Velpunru.[60] During the time of Rajaraja III (1198-1211)[61] a dancer constructed high walls inside the temple of Vellaimurti Alvar, for which she and her descendents received certain privileges of the temple, such as waving the yak-tail fans before the deity in the car processions and a daily gift of rice.[62] The waving of the yak-tail fans must have been a coveted duty because the granting of this honour to *devadasis* was thought worth recording in several inscriptions. The performance of this ritual is recorded as early as Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* in his description of worship at the Mahakala temple at Ujjain.[63] A dancing girl holding a yak-tail is a common sculptural motif throughout India.[64] One of the stories associated with the temple at Madurai :

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"refers to a *Dasi*, or dancing girl named Hema of Sri Pushpavana Tirupuvana who was an ardent devotee of Siva.....The idol which bears the dancing girl's kiss is placed in the temple at Madurai."[65]

In addition to dancers being used interchangeably between temple and court, they were also an important part of festival celebrations, ostensibly religious, but also secular in function.[66] King Jogaladeva of Nadol in Rajasthan was insistent that all festivals be celebrated with dance. In 1147 at the temple of Laksmanasvamin at Nadol, in Rajasthan he decreed :

"The order is that when a festival of any particular god commences, the courtezans, attached to the temple of other gods must also put on their ornaments and best garments.....to celebrate it by instrumental music, dancing and singing and so forth."[67]

Jogaladeva then states that anyone who tries to abolish dance at festivals will be dealt with by the ruler, and the inscription ends with a curse on any prince who does not maintain this practice.

According to European travellers, dance remained popular at festivals.[68] Fray Sebastien Manrique in the 17th century writes of the car festival in Bengal during Durga *puja* :

"This strumpet (Durga) is carried along in a highly ornamented triumphal car with a large band of dancing girls, who besides dancing, gain a livelihood by prostitution. These dancers go in front, dancing and playing various musical instruments and singing festal songs."[69]

Abbe Dubois in the 19th century also saw dancing during the car festival at Tirupati and he recorded that at this time Lord Venkatesvara through his brahmins selected new dancing girls from the crowd that came to celebrate his festival.[70] During the car festival the *basavis*, a group of

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women from the Konkan area, not dedicated temple dancers yet dedicated to the temple through the same type of marriage ceremony as a temple dancer, could, according to custom, change their mates.[71]

Abbe Dubois saw that the harvest festival of South India, Pongal, was celebrated with dance,[72] a feature that is being revived today. As late as 1910 *devadasis* were displayed in the floating festival at Dohnavur, Tinnevelly district.

> 'For on the dais of the barge in the place of honour nearest the idols, stood three women and a child. The women were swathed in fold upon fold of rich violet silk, sprinkled all over with tinsel and gold; they were crowned with white flowers, wreathed round a gold ornament like a full moon set in their dark hair...The three swaying forms—for they swayed keeping time to the music that never ceased-resembled one's idea of goddesses rather than familiar womenkind.'[73]

The marriage festival has usually been a time for dance.[74] Kalidasa in his *Kumarasambhava* records dance at the wedding of Siva.[75] Dance as part of the festivities at Hindu weddings during British rule in India has been portrayed in woodcuts and painting, and after its decline in popularity during early and post independence days it is a practice that is being re-introduced. This is largely a result of the growing popularity of dance and an outgrowth of its secularization. In fact in 1971, I was one of many Indian classical dancers who presented solo recitals during the week long marriage celebrations at Mathura for the *Raja* of Nathadwara, for no longer is dance the preserve of the *devadasis*. To-day many of this group have either stopped performing, or died, and with modernization and caste mobility their sons (who were dancers and musicians) are going to school and replacing a traditional education with 'respectable' and secure positions. In fact, Indian dance may be likened to the western attitude to ballet dancers at

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the turn of the century, considered as an accomplishment for most little girls but discouraged as a full time profession. This popularity now experienced by Indian classical dance has existed only in the last twenty years.

The reasons for kings encouraging temple dancing were not always religious. Alberuni, writing in the 11th century[76] observed in the temples of North India :

> ".....no Brahmin priest would suffer in their idol temples the women who sing and dance and play. The kings make them an attraction for their cities.....by the revenue they derive from the business both as fines, and taxes, they want to recover the expenses which the treasury has spent on the army."

Tavernier (17th century) observed, that for the same reasons, the king of Golconda encouraged public women because they promoted a large consumption of alcoholic drinks over which the Government had a monopoly. While the number of dancers seemed to have declined in the last century from the 20,000 described with possible exaggeration by Tavernier at Golconda[77] they were still very important and their numbers considerable. Those attached to temples were listed in the temple records; the Suchindram temple in Kerala recorded seventy-two[78] in 1819. Certainly temple dancers were very much in evidence in South India when Dr. Buchanan, (a Medical Doctor) and Abbe Dubois wrote in the 19th century. Abbe Dubois stated that every temple of importance had eight to twelve *devadasis* attached to it[79] while Buchanan observed that the two large temples of Kanchipuram had about one hundred dancing girls attached to them.[80] The local Government reports of 1912 reported that *devadasis* existed in Assam, Madras, and at the Jagannatha temple in Orissa, but not in Bengal, Sind, Uttar Pradesh or Gujarat.[81] Even in 1932, by which time dance in temples had been declared unlawful in British India, Mr. P.G. Sundaresa reported at the annual conference of the Madras Music Academy :

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"We all know that to-day, even in Pandaripur, daily worship is being done in the temple accompanied by *natyam* (dance); similarly in Srirangam, during the ten days preceding the Mukkotai Ekadasi day, worship is generally accompanied by *natyam*."[82]

The above accounts of dance in courts, temples and as an accomplishment of courtesans illustrate that it was widespread in India.

The paying of royal honours to a deity made up the chief part of the duties performed in the temple by the *devadasis*.[83] These depended on the region : those from Kerala swept the temple while those from Tamil Nadu considered sweeping beneath their status. Most accounts list the waving of lights in front of the idol as one of the main duties. Abbe Dubois describes this ceremony and records that it took place twice a day,[84] as do the accounts in the Sucindram[85] and Rameswaram temples.[86] Dance as part of the ritual in divine worship was listed as fifteenth in the sixteen acts of honour and homage paid to the deities.[87] An inscription during the reign of Kulottunga III (1205-1218)[88] registers :

"The assignment of a fixed period in the day for every dancing girl to perform her services by turns to the temple."[89]

Marco Polo recorded that in the 13th century at the temple in Tanjore[90] the dancers performed while food was in front of the idol.[91] Paes in the 16th century also observes this at Vijayanagar :

"The Brahmins feed the idol every day, and when he eats women dance before him."[92]

Abbe Dubois records singing and dancing twice a day in temples of importance.[93] This practice continued into the twentieth century as the Travancore State Manual of 1906

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records Tamil *devadasis* dancing and singing before the deity.[94] Dance was recorded with some accuracy at the Ramesvaram temple in 1920 :

> "At 4.30 or 5 a.m. (the *puja* begins).....the dancing girl (muraikari) officiating for the day, with rudraksha beads in place of jewels, dressed up as a Brahmani and her hair uncombed.....open (sic) up all the doors up to the mahamandapa. Later the god is taken in procession preceded by musicians and attendant dancing girl..... the dancing girl at the door repeats a tevara padal or verse in honour of Siva."[95]

In the State of Travancore there were two classes of *devadasis* : one group performing as part of the daily worship, another being reserved for performances during festivals.[96] However, this delegation of duties was not always followed, particularly in the Tamil temples. The Sucindram temple in the old State of Travancore, but with many customs linked to Tamil Nadu, records a division of duties that first began with those *devadasis* who were the best dancers being selected to dance in front of the principal deity, but later this duty became hereditary.[97] Perhaps the most outstanding difference between Tamil *devadasis* and those from Travancore is that those from the Tamil areas would dance at secular functions, particularly private gatherings, and the Travancore *devadasis* would not.[98] While this gave the latter a much higher social position,[99] it is generally accepted, from the living tradition that survives to-day, that the Tamil *devadasis* achieved a higher degree of proficiency in dance than those from other areas.

We saw earlier that by the twentieth century dance had been banned from the temples of British India. No such official restriction existed in the princely States such as Pudukkotai, however, until they became part of India at independence in 1947. When I spoke to two *devadasis* named Muthulakshmi and Saraswati, there in 1973, both

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told me that they had been actively attached to the temples and courts of Pudukkottai and had shared both the responsibilities for the performance at festivals, as well as the daily worship in the temples. It is from such *devadasis* that the tradition has been passed on; however, the form in which it survives to-day has often been altered to suit contemporary tastes. This was evident when I watched one of Muthalakshmi's students (Saraswati had retired in 1947) during her class in the old Pudukkottai palace, and compared her *abhinaya* with Muthalakshmi's own rendering of a song (*padam*). When questioned about this, Muthalakshmi conceded that she was teaching something different, but said in defence that it was necessary to adapt to the demands of the public. Many dancers continued to perform well into old age. Kamakshi, (1810-90) one of the dancers attached to the court of Tanjore, danced until she was seventy-five,[100] and Balasaraswati, one of Kamakshi's descendents, is now well into her fifties, still performing, and currently acclaimed as one of the greatest living exponents of Bharata Natyam. Not all dancers continued to dance into later life, however, and a retirement ceremony is mentioned in the records of the Sucindram temple for *devadasis* who had reached advanced age or become chronically ill.[101] Facing the assembly of priests (as was her enrolment) the *devadasi* unhooked her earrings and presented a gift of money. The earrings were returned to her, but she no longer wore them. Thurston also records the removal of jewelry on retirement, and a reduction in salary.[102] Dubois writes that at the Tirupati temple the women could be 'divorced' by the God if the brahmins no longer found them pleasing.[103] However, with this one exception, the *devadasi* system does seem to have afforded some security, since after dedication the girls were given a house, food and sometimes land.[104]

Amy Carmichael, a missionary working in South India, wrote that the temple not only provided bare subsistence but that on dedication the girl's funeral expenses were assured.[105] The Gazeteer of the Godavari district records in 1907, that

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the funeral pyre of every girl of the dancing caste (*Sani*) should be lit with fire brought from the temple.[106] The same source noted that a similar practice was to be found in the Srirangam temple near Tiruchirapalli.

It should be clear from these scattered references that dance and dancers have always formed an integral part of traditional Indian culture, and to designate them a strictly religious or secular function is impossible. For *devadasis* too, dance was a fundamental condition of existence; something so important that it brooked no questioning. This is poetically illustrated by a story from the Rajatarangani :

> "Once the king (Lalitaditya Muktapida).....(699-736 A.D.)[107] took out himself alone an untrained horse into a waste land in order to break it in. There, far away from men, he saw one maid of lovely form singing and another dancing. He observed they came to the same spot several days later so he came up and questioned them. They told him : "We are dancing girls belonging to a temple.....By the directions of our mothers, who got their living here, we perform at this spot dancing... This custom handed down by tradition has become fixed in our family. Its reason we can not know nor can anyone else."

Later the king causes an excavation to be done on the spot and an old temple is discovered.[108]

The importance of dance and dancers in Indian culture is as old as the *Rig Veda*, but while historical records of the temples refer to them, relatively little is known about them. It is unfortunate that these living repositories of Indian culture and tradition were persecuted for a period. Today, however, the wheel has come full circle and these same *devadasis* are being given public recognition. We can only hope that they will be encouraged to pass on as much as possible of their heritage, which represents the accumulated knowledge of generations. It is fortunate that such a remarkable art form has survived to the present day.

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Footnotes to Chapter V

1. *Mirror of Gesture*, (*Abhinayadarpana*) trans, A Coomaraswamy, p. 1.
2. *Madras Census Report* for 1901, p. 151. See also Punekar and Rao, *A Study of Prostitutes* in Bombay, p. 3.
3. *Madras Legislative debates*, Nov. 4, 1927, speech of Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddy.
4. Thurston, E. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. II, pp. 125-153.
5. *1901 Census Report of India*, p. 151.
6. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, Feb. 27, 1922, pp. 2600-2601.
7. *Legislative Debates of India*, Feb. 27, 1922, p. 2604.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 2602.
9. Dubois, Abbe. J.A., 1897, *Hindu Manners: Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 593.
10. *Legislative Debates of India*, Feb. 27, 1922, p. 2600.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 2600.
12. Penzer, N.M., "Sacred Prostitution", p. 257.
13. *Legislative Debates of India*, Feb. 27, 1922, pp. 2600-2601. Penzer, N.M., *op. cit.*, pp. 257-260.
14. *Legislative Debates of India*, Feb. 27, 1922, p. 2600.
15. Pillay, K.K., *Sucindram Temple*, p. 281.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
17. *Legislative Debates of India*, Feb. 27, 1922, p. 2600.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 2601, quotes the Madras Census Report for 1911.

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19. Pillay, K.K., *op. cit.*, p. 282. Dubois, Abbe. J.A., 1897, *Hindu Manners ; Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 595.

20. Coomaraswamy, A., *The Dance of Siva*, p. 123.

21. *Rig Veda*, trans. H.H. Wilson, Vol. I, p. 237, I.XCII, fn. a. Auboyer, J., Daily Life in Ancient India, p. 237. She states that the early dancers were courtesans : *Vesya-ganika*, not temple dancers.

22. Kautilya, *Arthasastra*, trans. R. Shamasastry, p. 141.

23. *Laws of Manu*, trans. by G. Buhler, IX. 225, p. 381.

24. Horner, I.B., *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, pp. 89-90.

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25. De Zoete, B., *The Other Mind*, p. 166, fin. I.

26. Sewell, R., *The Forgotten Empire*, p. 242.

27. Auboyer, J., *Daily Life in Ancient India*, pp. 269-70.

28. Vatsyayan, K. *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts*, p. 232.

29. Dandin, *Dasha-Kumara-Charita*, *The Ten Princes*, trans. A. Rider, p. 73.

30. Kalidasa, *Meghaduta*, trans. F.&E. Egerton, I. 35.

31. Altekar, A.S., *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, p. 183.

32. *Vamana Purana*, trans. a board of scholars, p. 13 ; 3.36.31.

33. *Panchama gata*, or the highest key is considered erotic.

34. Rambha was one of the heavenly dancers in Indra's court. Bhavani is a local name for a temple dancer.

35. Sircar, D.C., "Devadasis in Buddhist Temples," *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXV, No. 12, 1963, p. 97.

36. Somadeva, *Kathasaritsagara*, trans. C.H. Tawney, Vol. V, p. 7.

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37. Sharma Dasharatha, *Early Chauhan Dynasties*, p. 225.

38. Kautilya, *Arthasastra*, trans. R. Shamasastry, p. 139.

39. Dubois Abbe, J.A., 1972, p. 585.

40. Kalhana *Rajatarangini* trans., M.A. Stein, Vol. I, I.151, p. 28.

41. Sircar, D.C., "Devadasis in Buddhist Temples," *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXV, No. 12, 1963, p. 97.

42. *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. II, part III, 1895, pp. 259-60.

43. Iyengar, Srinivasa, C.R., *Indian Dance*, p. 1.

44. Zvelebil, K., *The Smile of Murugan*, p. 178.

45. *Silappadikaram*, trans by V.R.R. Dikshitar, p. 105.

46. Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha, *A History of South India*, p. 179.

47. Ayyer, P.V. Jagadissa, *South Indian Shrines*, No. 128 of 1912.

48. Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

49. *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. III, part III, 1920, p. 379.

50. Sastsi, K.A. Nilakantha, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

51. *Madras, Epigraphical Report*, 25th August, 1915, p. 16, no. 65 of 1914. Butterworth, A., and Aiyangar, S. Krishna Swami, "TAMIL Hymns of the Margazhi Festival, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. LV, 1926, p. 188, verse 12.

52. *Pudukkottai State Inscriptions*, 1929, No. 128.

53. Saletore, B.A., *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, Vol. II., pp. 409-410. Bazaz, P.N., *Daughters of the Vitasta*, p. 109.

54. Saletore, B.A., *The Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, Vol. II., p. 411.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 411.

56. *Marg*, Special Edition on the Classical and Folk Dances of India, 1963, part VI, p. 8. *Kollatam* is a folk dance of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

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The dancers strike small sticks which they hold in their hands. See also Bowers, F., *Theatre in the East*, p. 53.

57. Saletore, B.A., *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, p. 40.

58. Vatsyayan, *Kamasutra*, trans by S.C. Upadhyaya, v. 25, p. 214.

59. Fleet, J.B.,"Sanscrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions" *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. X., April 1881, p. 103.

60. *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. X., 1948, No. 249.

61. Sastri, K.A.N., *A History of South India*, pp. 213-14.

62. *South Indian Epigraphy*, 1923, year ending 31st March, p. 106, No. 172 of 1923.

63. Kalidasa, *Meghaduta*, trans F. & E. Egerton, I. 35.

64. Boner, A., *Silpa Prakasa*, p. 51.

65. Ayyer, Jagadisa, P.V., *South Indian Shrines*, p. 168.

66. *Visnudharmottara Purana*, trans. P. Shah, p. 191.

> "After the procession of the king through the city with a small image of the deity.....then a festival should commence beginning from the second day one should hold performance of actors, male and female dancers.....and give them money."

67. Bhandarkar, D.R., "The Chahamanas of Marwar", *Epigraphica, Indica*, Vol. XI, 1911-12, p. 27.

68. Saletore, B.A., *The Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, p. 412.

69. *The Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique*, trans. C. Eckford Luard., Vol. I, p. 71.

70. Dubois, Abbe, J.A., 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

71. Thurston, E., *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. II, p. 136.

72. Dubois, Abbe, J.A., 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 574.

73. Carmichael, A., *Lotus Buds*, p. 388.

74. Vatsyayan, K., *Indian Classical Dance in Literature and the Arts*, p. 221.

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75. Kalidasa, *Kumarasambhava*, trans. R. Griffith, p. 79.

76. Sachau, C.E., *Alberumi*, Vol. I., p. ix; Vol. II, p. 157.

77. *Travels of Jean Baptisi-Tavernier*, Vol. I, trans. V. Ball, pp. 127-128.

78. Pillay, K.K., *The Sucindram Temple*, p. 285.

79. Dubois, A., 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 585.

80. Buchanan, F., *Journey from Madras through Mysore, Kanara and Malabar*, Vol. I, pp. 12-13.

81. *Government of India Legislative Debates*, 27th February, 1922, p. 610.

82. *Journal of the Madras Music Academy*, 1932, Debate held on the sixth day of the Annual Conference, Dec. 28, 1932, on. "The encouragement of the art of Bharata Natyam", p. 122.

83. Sastri, Krishna, H., *South Indian Gods and Goddesses*, p. 3.

84. Dubois, A., 1887, *op. cit.*, p. 595. See also Dubois, A., 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

85. Pillay, K.K., *The Sucindram Temple*, p. 284.

86. Ayyar, P.V. Jagadisa, *The Southern Shrines*, p. 193.

87. Nannithamby, Loganayaky, "Fine Arts and Recreation during the Cola Period,": *Journal of Tamil Studies*, Vol. I, No. 2, Oct. 1969, p. 59. See also Kane P.V., *A History of the Dharma Sastras*, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 705-740.

88. Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha, *A History of South India*, p. 211.

89. *State Inscriptions of Pudukkottai*, 1929, p. 20, No. 162.

90. Yule, Henry, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian*, Vol. II, pp. 335, 329. Tanjore is called Malabar by Marco Polo.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

92. Saletore, B.A., *The Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, p. 411, see also p. 409 where Nuniz, who was also writing about Vijayanagar in the 16th century states that Saturday was the day

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for the dancing girls to perform before the royal deities.

93. Dubois, A., 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 585. See also Penzer, C.M., "Sacred Prostitution," appendix IV in C.H. Tawney's translation of Somadeva's *Kathasarit-sagara*, Vol. I, p. 253.

94. Ariya Nagam, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, p. 385.

95. Ayyar, P. V. Jagadisa, *Southern Shrines*, 1920, p. 193.

96. Pillay, K.K., *The Sucindram Temple*, p. 283.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

98. *Ibid.*

99. Ariya, V. Nagam, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 1906, p. 383.

100. Menon, Narayana, *Balasaraswati*, p. 17.

101. Pillay, K.K., *op. cit.*, p. 286.

102. Thurston, E., *Tribes and Castes of Southern India*, p. 141, See also Penzer, N.M., "Sacred Prostitution," p. 262.

103. Dubois, A., 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

104. Pillay, K.K., *op. cit.*, p. 285.

105. De Zoete, B., *The Other Mind*, p. 167.

106. Hemingway, F.R., *Gazetteer of the Godaveri District*, 1907, p. 208.

107. Dhar, Somnath, *Kalhana, Poet Historian of Kashmir*, p. 9.

108. Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, trans. M.A. Stein, Vol. I, IV. 265-271.

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CHAPTER VI

SECULARISM IN YAKSHAGANA

—Martha B. Ashton

The Yakshagana dance-drama of the Kanara Coast is considered a religious art form because it relives the c eation and life stories of the Hindu deities as well as episodes revealing their intervention into and effect on the lives of mortals. The dance-drama through Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranic legends reinforces the theme that Hinduism is all encompassing, that is; that everything in life is in some way related to religion. Therefore, if we want to discuss "secularism" in a Hindu dance-drama we must first be cognizant of the fact that "secularism" is a relatively recent concept in Indian thought. "Secular" is an Anglo-Saxon English word with its root in Latin; and there appear to be no equivalents in any of the Indian languages. Moreover, it seems that the nearest similar term is a combination of Sanskrit words "dharmaniraphekshata" which means "no favoritism towards any particular religion." The problem is then that we are attempting to discuss an aspect of the Hindu culture in terms of an English word, the concept of which is not indigenous to the Hindu culture. Accordingly we must be aware then, that whatever is considered "secular"

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from the point of view of one culture is not necessarily considered so from the points of view of other cultures.

With all this in mind let us consider "secularism" in Yakshagana beginning with a subject that is sure to be controversial, that of the romances of Lord Krishna. These are described in a collection of 14 songs four or five of which are alternatively sung and danced to as part of the preliminary rituals of each traditional Yakshagana performance. The dance is sensual, yet tastefully performed by two male youths dressed in female attire. The songs suggest that these two can be either wives of Lord Vishnu, or Gopis.

To an outsider the words of this first song appear only as those of a jealous female. It is only if one knows the stories of Krishna that all the clues are recognized and the song gains religious significance. Even so we do not know if this song is an expression of a jealous wife or a jealous mistress.

Raga Kalyani Adi Tala

I can't bear this mischief.
He is a great adulterer, mother.
He is a butter thief and
he is strong in magic.
But at the same time
he is very charming.
When the ladies are going to fetch water,
he blocks their way and calls them to him.
With such small hands he will lift the
big mountains and secretly enjoy the eight ladies.[1]

The beginning part of this next song suggests that it is only one wife making known her jealousy of another wife. In the latter lines, however, references to the avatars appear. Yet, only those who are knowledgeable in these legends are able to distinguish that the subject is the God Vishnu, not an ordinary man being scolded.

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Raga Kalyani Rupaka Tala

Oh ! My dear female companion. What am I to do ?
My dear lord has gone to another wife,
to a place where they will enjoy each other.
I am feeling so lonely here.
These are the fruits I reap for marrying him.
What am I to do ?
Shall I make a house in the water and keep him there ?
Shall I put my burden on him.
Or by some native root shall I cure him of his cruel ways ?
Whom can I tell ?
Whom can I ask ?
Can I call him a beggar (of love) by nature ?
Can I give up this jealousy and once again join him ?
Shall I ever talk to him again or shall I leave him forever ?
Tell me if he has any affection,
he (Parashurama) who has killed his mother;
he (Rama) who has monkeys for companions.
What is the use of giving him advice.
How am I to beat this ?
He is so much taken up with (Satya) Bhama.
He has permanently settled there.
This great fellow has no shame.
What am I to do ?
Shall I get him (Kalki) a horse to ride in the end.[2]

The third song tells of a husband longing for his beloved wife. Only in one line is the husband's name mentioned and we know that this is a religious song.

Raga Natai Adi Tala

Beautiful lady, rich in her virtues,
come and let us enjoy one another.
I am suffering from passion. Come.

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I'll embrace you affectionately.
Come ! Come ! Come ! Come !

Beautiful lady, I am forever thinking
of you in my dreams.
Don't break my heart.
It's not proper. It's not proper.
Llla, lla, lla, wife.

Beautiful lady, Guru Venkateshwara is
the only protection.
How can you forget him.[3]
Ta, ta, ta, wife.

The next song is usually the last song of these particular rituals. It appears to be a song that many a wife probably did and still does sing. But it does not give us any indication as to whose wife should get the credit here.

Raga Kalyani Rupaka Tala

Mother, I am bidding you goodby.
I am leaving for my home.
I don't know my destiny.
I came here in the hope of staying for ten days
as I was suffering from my mother-in-law's nagging.
But can we erase what Brahma has written or
what actions we have done in the previous life ?
How can I disobey my husband, shamelessly listening
to others ?
He is always punishing me by abuses.[4]

To those who are both knowledgeable and who are devotees these songs are considered religious. To those who are neither perhaps these songs could be considered secular ?

Let us now turn to the possibilities of secularism in Yakshagana humour. The Yakshagana texts rarely contain humour. This is brought about through the folk songs and

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through the impromptu dialogue which follows the performance of songs, poems or explanatory passages of the texts. Although conversation between or among the non-comic characters might be clever and witty the comic mood of the performance mainly depends on the abilities of the clowns.

The clown actors play the roles of sages like Narada and Valmiki, guards, messengers, and servants. One of the most enjoyable roles of the clown is that of being the guard for the Pandavas' Ashwamedha horse in "The Battle of Babhruwahana." The horse roams into the kingdom of Queen Pramila. Pramila's female guards find the clown sleeping instead of watching the horse. Clapping their hands and shouting, the guards try to awake him. But he rolls over and yawns. When he is finally awoken, he notices with delight that he is surrounded by lovely young maidens. He dances to and sometimes sings alongwith the Bhagavata a comic folk-song entitled "Oh, you girl."

Lavani Eka Tala

Oh, you girl !
Who are you ?
Who came with you ?
Tell me quickly.

Oh, you girl !
Clever one, who is your father ?
Here, show me your face ?
Married or unmarried ?
Tell me quickly.

Oh, you girl !
Mara's (God of Love's) flowered arrow is shot.
My mind is filled.
Lady, I promise you I am telling the truth.
I am in a state of emotional frenzy.

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Furthermore, you forget everything else.
I will make you happy.
I won't leave you.
It's getting dark and I'm getting hungry.
Don't delay, come quickly.
Don't you want to come ?[5]

With comic facial movement he flirts with, chases the girls, and tells how infatuated he is with them.

If the clown is playing the part of the gate-keeper and must protect his master's kingdom or possessions, he is usually the loser. The clown's weapon is a long stick. The victor pulls the clown's arms back and bends them at the elbows. Through the opening caused by the bent elbows the victor puts the clown's stick and leaves him defeated. The clown bemoans his situation to the Bhagavata and asks the Bhagavata to remove the stick.

In one scene from *The Battle of Abhimanyu*, a king's messenger comes to challenge Arjuna to battle. The clown playing the role of the messenger created an aura of nonsense as he entered miming a deformed person and talking as though he were hare-lipped. Arjuna asked how he had come to this State. The clown replied that when his wife was pregnant she craved a liquid sweet (payasam) made from a sour fruit pod (tamarind). He had climbed the tree to get the fruit and had fallen. Arjuna cured him with a magic arrow.[6]

In another scene from *The Battle of Abhimanyu* Kaurava's servant comes to announce the arrival of Kaurava's friend, the demon Samasaptaka, from Patala. The servant says to Kaurava : "He has come from Patala." Kaurava says : "Who has come from Patala ?" Then the clown runs to ask Samasaptaka what to tell Kaurava. Samasaptaka beats the clown and says, "I have come from Patala." The clown then runs to Kaurava and says : "I have come from Patala."

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Kaurava beats the clown, again says : "You have not come from Patala. Now you go and ask the name of the person who has come." Finally the clown gets the message straight and Kaurava receives his friend. Later on in the same sequence Samasaptaka agrees to fight on Kaurava's side against the Pandavas. When preparing to give and receive the betel leaf and nut as a sign of their contract, Kaurava requests the clown not to make any noise. Pretending he cannot help himself the clown sneezes, trips on his own feet and falls on the floor, then yawns loudly. After each incident the annoyed Kaurava beats him with a handerkerchief.[7]

The clown rarely escapes without a beating from his superior. In *The Wedding of Kanakangi*, the servant accompanies Abhimanyu in search of Abhimanyu's mother, Subhadra. When they found Subhadra she was sleeping soundly. The clown says that she must have died, therefore, they are not able to wake her. As Subhadra awakes, Abhimanyu beats the clown with mango leaves for trying to fool him.[8]

The demoness also brings humour with her role. Unlike the mighty demon who, regardless of his so-called evil nature still commands the fear and respect of the audience, the demoness is known to use any devious means to have her way. She is famous for her disguises, from beautiful damsels down to the ugliest old crones. In the dance introducing the demoness into the story the actor shows her completing her daily routine, that is, through mime and to rhythmic drum beats she brushes her teeth, washes her hair, combs her hair with her fingers, kills some lice in the process and then throws her hair over her shoulders. In a make-believe mirror she admires herself and puts on her make-up. After her entrance she asks the singer how she looks. He tells her that her appearance is ugly and pretends to give her a mirror. Looking into the mirror she agrees and says she will return as a beautiful maiden,

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The following is a sample of the demoness Shurpanika's dialogue with the singer. It occurs during *Lava and Kusha's Battles*. In this scene she smells human flesh and imagines herself preparing a banquet. Making snorting sounds she searches and finds the young boys Lava and Kusha. Remembering that it was their father Rama, who had refused to marry her and their uncle Lakshmana who cut off her nose and breast her desire for revenge increased. But first she had to catch them. As the demoness she exits and another actor in gentle female attire enters.

Shurpanika (in disguise) says to the singer :
Do you know who I am ?

Singer : No.

Shurpanika : Did a big demoness come here ?

Singer : Yes.

Shurpanika : Well, I am she. How do I look ?

Singer : You look beautiful.

Shurpanika : I wasn't sure. People were gazing at me all along the way. Let me see a mirror. (The singer pretends to hand her a mirror.) Oh, yes ! I am wearing precious jewels, therefore, I am attractive. I have a swing that is going to be a death trap for my victims. I'm going to decorate it with fragrant flowers. It's a magic swing ? Did you know that ? I'm going to sing with a voice as beautiful as the cuckoo and they will be spellbound by the beauty of my song (and thereby be lured into my swing).[9]

The outcome of this adventure is that one brother warns the other that this girl must be a demoness. Why ? Because she is not singing the raga properly. Nevertheless one brother is charmed into the swing which she takes high into

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the sky. Her play is spoiled when the other brother shoots down the swing.

The regional flavor of South Kanara is often reflected in the dialogue. One example occurs in the talk of the singer, a character named Chikka and another called Kichaka. Prior to Kichaka's entrance, a poor man, Chikka, played by the clown, discusses his life story with the singer and talks about buying bufalloes, preparing them for and entering them into a particular local race. As far as I know buffalo-racing is unique to South Kanara. After further chat about buying and selling dried coconuts and all sorts of local varieties of plantains, Chikka exits. He re-enters with Kichaka.

Kichaka says that he has not been to visit his sister for some time. He wants to go now and wants Chikka to accompany him. Chikka asks if Kichaka's sister will prepare him some good food. If so, he will come. Kichaka suggests that she will certainly do so and inquires into Chikka's desires. Chikka wants among other things chicken rotti which in South Kanara refers to a very hot chicken curry served ever paper-thin crisp-edged rice pancakes—a specialty of the Bant community of this coastal area. He also wants boiled rice and payasa, a favorite liquid sweet of South India. In time they come near the house of Kichaka's sister. Kichaka instructs Chikka to go and announce their arrival. Chikka who has come in the hope of getting good food is overcome when he sees Kichaka's sister cooking and forgets his purpose. With his mouth watering he speaks.

Chikka : Amma, (mother) what are you doing ?

Sudeshna : I am frying rotti, Chikka.

Chikka : Why have the edges become black, amma ?

Sudeshna : The fire has become too hot.

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Chikka : Is it so, amma ? Then give it to me. I'll eat it.

He takes it and returns to Kichaka and tells him what has happened. Then Kichaka asks Chikka if he told her that her younger brother Kichaka had come. He sheepisly admitted that he had not, returned to announce Kichaka's arrival and then both entered Sudeshna's house.[10]

The dialogue between the singer and Babruwahana's political minister in *The Battle of Babhruwahana* is proof on how it must have been in the past when wandering troupes of Yakshagana artists, referred in the dialogue as Dashavatara players, or players of the stories of ten avatars of Vishnu, tried to get people to sponsor their performances. An excerpt follows :

Minister : How many of you are there ?

Singer : We are forty.

Minister : Whose house did you start out to deplete ?. If this many of you go to one house, how can it survive.

Singer : For our purposes we need this many people.

Minister : From which direction did you come ?
Didn't you cross a river on the way ?

Singer : Yes, we crossed a river. And the boatman there has no sense. He caused one of our group to drown, so we are really less than usual in number.

Minister : All right. Let that be. We will agree to sponsor your performance by giving you four seers of rice.

Singer : That is not enough rice for this many people.

Minister : We'll give you other things as well. And we'll give you an abundance of salt.

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Singer : Why so much salt ?

Minister : If you eat a lot of salt, you will drink a lot and that way your stomachs will become full.[11]

Except when the hunter is the God Shiva, perhaps this role also could be considered secular. The hunter's entrance along with his little hunters is always a spectacle. His very colorful costume and unusual headdress, along with a bon-fire and the acrobatics of the little hunters is topped off with some rather appropriate hunters' talk. The dialogue runs along these lines :

Hunter : In which direction shall we go to-day ? In which forest shall we hunt ? We're so hungry. What animals and birds do we want to hunt to-day. We'll take the net and several dogs, knives, spears and bows. Who will go to drive the animals in our direction ? (Looking at one boy) Where will you go ?

Boy : I will sit on the river bank. When the animals come to drink I'll shoot them.

Another Boy : I will sit in the cashew tree (common in South Kanara). When the animals come to eat the fruit I will shoot them.

Third Boy : There are two hills and a salty stream running. There I will sit and catch the animals.[12]

Through the above examples I have suggested that even though the concept of secularism was not realized as being a part of Hindu culture, that is, they did not have a term to express it, nevertheless these examples of dialogue imply that secular situations exist in this Hindu religious dance drama. Perhaps the mystery lies in a word lost or removed from the vocabularies thousands of years ago.

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Footnotes to Chapter VI

1. *Yakshagana Sabhalakshana and Prasangapithige* (Udipi, South Kanara, Mysore, India : Pavanje Gururao and Sons, 1968-69, p. 38 (in Kannada). All songs from this work quoted in this paper were translated by Srimati B. Leela Bhat, Reader and Head of the Department of Kannada, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial College, Udupi.
2. *Sabhalakshana*, p. 39.
3. *Sabhalakshana*, pp. 40-41.
4. *Sabhalakshana*, pp. 39-40.
5. A Kannada folk-song which is traditionally performed in *The Battle of Babhruwahana*. Translated by Srimati B. Leela Bhat.
6. Recorded at a performance of *The Battle of Abhimanyu* by Kamalashile Troupe, Brahmavara, South Kanara, December 7, 1970. Translated by L. Bhat.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Recorded at a performance of *The Wedding of Kanakangi* by Perduru Troupe, near Hiriadka, South Kanara, January 8, 1970. Translated by L. Bhat.
9. Recorded at a performance of *Lava and Kusha's Battle* by Kadiyali Temple Troupe, Udupi, February 20, 1971. Translated by L. Bhat.
10. Collected by Sri Hiriyadka Gopala Rao, November 1976 and translated by the author. Although this dialogue is known to several performers it has rarely been performed in the last fifty years.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Collected by Sri Hiriyadka Gopala Rao and translated by Rao and the author. The last two sentences are risque. The two hills symbolize a woman's breasts and the salty stream represents her urine.

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PART II

CHAPTER VII

BHARATA NATYAM*

—Dr. T. Balasarawathi

There is a special relationship between Tamil Music and Bharathanatyam. The melodious Tamil lyrics of Muthuthandavar, Ganam Krishna Iyer and Subbarama Iyer lend themselves wonderfully well for dancing with intense participation. It is the distinguishing feature of Tamil music that compositions, coming in an unbroken line from the Vaishnava and Saiva Saints through Gopalakrishna Bharathi down to the composers of our own time, are replete with moods and feelings suitable for *abhinaya*.[1]

As far as I know, Bharatanatyam is *Bhakti*,[2] Tamil is also nothing but *Bhakti*. I believe, therefore, that Tamil and *Bhakti* are part of the same tradition.

In *Silappadikaram*[3] eleven dances[4] are referred to which were danced by Divinities like *Shiva*, *Tirumal* (Vishnu)

* (This is a slightly edited version of the author's Presidential address to the Tamil Isai Sangam Annual Conference in December 1975)

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Murugan, *Kama*, *Kali*, *Tirumagal* (Lakshmi) and Indrani. They depict the destruction of various demons and symbolise the triumph of good over evil. This is evidence enough that the dance was a divine art whose theme was the destruction of evil and the purification of the spirit.

In these early dance forms, valour and wrath are the predominant emotions. Yet, *sringara*[5] which was later to become the ruling mood of *abhinaya* was pre-eminent in the Tamil dance tradition right from the beginning. In the two important dance forms *viz.*, the court dance and the common dance, which relate respectively to the inner and the outer life of man, *sringara* belongs to the court and to the inner life. This explains the eminence of *sringara* as a mood. In dances such as the group Dance of the Cowherd Girls, this same *sringara* becomes the love of God. This bhakti-love is beautifully expressed in the following verses of *Silappadikaram* :

A girl to her girl friend :

The Magical One,
Who shook the young tree like a stick,
And brought the fruits down
Should he come amidst our cattle,
Shall we not hear again,
The music of the sweet Konrai flute
On his lips !

And

Oh, the look on her face !
Her dress and bangles slipped away
With her hands, she covered herself.
Seeing her,
Who hid herself with her hands,
His shame and pity became wild passion.
Oh, the look on his face !

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It is this stream of *sringara* that swells into the mighty river of the lover-beloved songs of the Vaishnava and Saiva Saints, the *ashtapadis* of Jayadeva and the compositions of Kshetranga. In Bharatanatyam too, when it comes to *abhinaya*, *sringara* has been the dominant mood.

I emphasise all this because some seek to "purify" Bharatanatyam by replacing the traditional lyrics which express *sringara* with devotional songs. I wish to respectfully submit to such protagonists that there is nothing in Bharatanatyam which can be purified afresh; it is divine as it is and innately so. The *sringara* we experience in Bharatanatyam is never carnal; never, never. For those who have yielded themselves to its discipline with total dedication, dance like, music, is the practice of the Presence; it cannot be merely the body's rapture.

Bharatanatyam is an art which consecrates the body which is considered to be in itself of no value. The *Yogi* by controlling his breath and by modifying his body acquires the halo of sanctity. Even so, the dancer who dissolves her identity in rhythm and music makes her body an instrument at least for the duration of the dance, for the experience and expression of the spirit.

I believe that the traditional order of the Bharatanatya recital *viz.*, *Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram*, *Sabdam*, *Varnam*, *Padams*, *Tillana* and the *Sloks* is the correct sequence in the practice of this art, which is an artistic *yoga*, for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal.

The greatness of this traditional concert pattern will be apparent even from a purely aesthetic point of view. In the beginning *alarippu* which is based on rhythm alone, brings out the special charm of pure dance. The movements of *alarippu* relax the dancer's body and thereby her mind, loosen and co-ordinate her limbs and prepare her for the dance. Rhythm has a rare capacity to concentrate.

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The *alarippu* is most valuable in freeing the dancer from distraction and making her single-minded.

The joy of pure rhythm in *alarippu* is followed by *jatiswaram* where there is the added joy of melody. Melody, without word or syllable, has a special power to unite us with our being. In *jatiswaram* melody and movement come together. Then comes the *sabdam*. It is here that compositions, with words and meanigs, which enable the expression of the myriad moods of Bharatanatyam are introduced.

The Bharatanatyam recital is structured like a Great Temple : we enter the outer tower of *alarippu*, cross the half-way hall of *jatiswaram*, then the great hall of *sabdam*, and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the varnam. This is the place, the space. which gives the most expansive scope to revel in the rhythm and moods and music of the dance. The varnam is the continuum which gives ever-expanding room to the dancer to delight in her self-fulfilment, by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art.

The *padams* now follow. In dancing to the *padams*, one experiences the containment, cool and quiet of entering the sanctum from its external precinct. The expanse and brilliance of the outer corridors disappear in the dark inner sanctum; and the rhythmic virtuousities of the the *varnam* yield to the soul-stirring music and *abhinaya* of the *padam*. Dancing to the padam is akin to the juncture when cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of God. Then, the *tillana* breaks into movement like the final burning of camphor accompanied by a measure of din and bustle. In conclusion, the devotee takes to his heart the god he has so far glorified outside; and the dancer completes the traditional order by dancing to a simple devotional verse.

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At first, mere metre; then, melody and metre; continuing with music, meaning and metre; its expansion in the centre-piece of the *varnam*; thereafter, music and meaning without metre; in variation of this, melody and metre; in contrast to the pure rhythmical beginning, non-metrical song at the end. We see a most wonderful completeness and symmetry in this art. Surely the traditional votaries of our music and dance would not wish us to take any liberties with this sequence.

The aesthetics and the artistry of Bharatanatyam alike make us realise that *sringara* has pride of place. In a sense, Bharatanatyam is a combination of *yoga* and *mantra sastras*.[6] The *mudras* of the *mantra sastra* are the same as the hand gestures of Bharatanayam. When dancing to the beats of the rhythm, as in a *yoga* exercise, the dancer's body is rid of its human weaknesses and is purified into a conduit of the spiritual and the beautiful. However, the experience of the art can be total only if a variety of moods and feelings are portrayed; and, variety is the soul of art. But these feelings should be universalised into aspects of divinity and not remain the limited experience of an insignificant human being. The mood of a song may tend to get portrayed as the subjective feeling of one individual; but true art lies in universalising this experience. To train the dancer in this art, melody and metre join together in *jatiswaram*. The dancer takes leave of her subjective consciouness in the *alarippu* and identifies herself with the universal consciousness in the *jatiswaram*. Hereafter, she is ready to explore and express the infinitely varied nuances of the entire gamut of emotions and feelings not in terms of her subjective self but in terms which bring out their universal essence.

Sringara stands supreme in this range of emotions. No other emotion is capable of better reflecting the mystic union of the human with the divine. I say this with deep personal experience of dancing to many great devotional

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songs which have had no element of *sringara* in them. Devotional songs are, of course, necessary. However, *sringara* is the cardinal emotion which gives the fullest scope for artistic improvisation, branching off continually, as it does, into the portrayal of innumerable moods full of newness and nuance.

If we approach Bharatanatyam with humility, learn it with dedication, and practice it with devotion to God, *sringara* which brings out the great beauties of this dance can be portrayed with all the purity of the spirit. The flesh which is considered to be an enemy of the spirit having been made a vehicle of the divine in the discipline of the dance, *sringara* which is considered to be the greatest obstacle to spiritual realisation, has itself, we shall realise, become the instrumentality for uniting the dancer with Divinity.

(Since the dancer has universalised her experience, all that she goes through is also felt and experienced by the spectator).

Refined in the crucible of *alarippu* and *jatiswaram*, the dancer portrays the emotions of the musical text in the *sabdam* in their pristine purity. In the *sabdam*, emotions are withheld at the beginning; thereafter, when the dancer has clarified herself, they are released in a measured and disciplined manner. It is after mastering this discipline, that she dances the *varnam* which is a living river that holds together movement and inter-pretation.

The composer of a *sabdam* or a *varnam* might have dedicated it to a prince or a nobleman. But as far as the dancer is concerned, the hero can only be the king of kings, the Lord of the wide world. It is impossible for her to dedicate her art, which has sanctified her body and has made her heart sacred, to a mere mortal. She can experience and communicate the sacred in what appears to be secular.

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After all, our composers have been steeped in the tradition of *bhakti*. While singing the praise of secular heros, they begin to dwell on his devotion to *Brahadeeswara* of *Thanjavur* or to *Tyagesa* of *Tiruvarur* or to *Padmanabha* of *Tiruvanandapuram*. The dancer taking the cue enters the realm of *bhakti*, enjoys the play and pranks of the deity concerned and displays them in her *abhinaya*. The divine, so far mixed with the secular, now becomes explicit in the dance and impresses itself deep in the heart. Various rhythmic movements are inter-twined with her *abhinaya*, this saves her from degenerating into the human, and keeps her fresh and pure in the *yoga* of the dance.

It is after passing through this ordeal of fire that the dancer fully qualifies herself to do *abhinaya* for the *padams*. If she has dedicated herself to the art, there will be no carnal distortions in her interpretations of the *padam*. Steeped in art and beauty, which are pure spiritual states, she expresses pure joy through different moods and emotions. Such a dancer will feel no need to "purify" any item in the traditional order of Bharatanatyam.

Indeed, the effort to purify Bharatanatyam through the introduction of novel ideas is like putting a gloss on burnished gold or painting the lotus.

The inadequacies that are felt in this art arise from the inadequacies of the dancer herself. If Bharatanatyam is studied with devotion, dedication, patience and thoroughness, its completeness in its traditional form will be crystal clear. The traditional sequence and structure of the recital secures and safeguards this completeness. There is, therefore, no need to purify perfection by amending, adding or subtracting any of the elements in the traditional order of the recital.

The traditional recital is a rich combination of diverse aesthetic and psychological elements which produces

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complete enjoyment. To alter this arrangement because it is considered "boring" is to destroy the integrity of aesthetic enjoyment.

Let those who create novel dance forms present them as separate performances; they need not make a hash of the Bharatanatyam recital by interpolations of novelties. Of Madhavi's dancing master, the Silapaddikaram says that "he knew when only one hand had to be used (*pindi*) and when two had to be used (*pinaiyal*). He also knew when the hands had to be used for exhibiting action (*tolirkai*) and when for graceful effect (*elirkai*). Knowing as he did the conventions of dancing, he did not mix up the single-handed demonstration (*kutai*) with the double-handed (*varam*) and *vice versa* as also pure gesture with gesticulatory movement and *vice versa*. In the movements of the feet also he did not mix up the *kuravai* with the *vari*. He was such an expert."

The dancer can integrate herself with her discipline if she goes through the traditional sequence in one continuous flow without too much of an interval between one item and another; and the completeness of the recital in its entirety will assert itself. My personal opinion is that this concerted effect of the experience of dancing which needs mental concentration is spoilt by frequent changes of costume.

Silappadikaram and *Manimekalai* list dance, music and the personal beauty of the dancer in that order. Yet unfortunately the last and least of them has come to the forefront at the present time. When so much importance is attached to the looks of the dancer, it is but natural that dancing is considered carnal and *sringara* vulgar. The truth is exactly the opposite; it is her dance and music alone that make a dancer beautiful.

Kalidasa describes *Malavika* standing tired and perspiring after her dance as the best of all her *abhinaya*. This is not

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just poetic conceit. Even when the collyrium gets smudged and the make-up is disturbed in the course of the dance, that too is a tribute to the dancer's dedication.

When the continuity of the dance is interrupted by costume changes, announcements and explanations, the congealing of inner feeling becomes impossible and concentration is shattered.

The greatest blessing of Bharatanatyam is its ability to control the mind. Most of us are incapable of single-minded contemplation even when actions are abandoned. On the other hand, in Bharatanatyam actions are not avoided; there is much to do but it is the harmony of various actions that results in the concentration we seek. The burden of action is forgotten in the pleasant charm of the art. The feet keeping to time, hands expressing gesture, the eye following the hand with expression, the ear listening to the dance master's music, and the dancer's own singing-by harmonising these five elements, the mind achieves concentration and attains clarity in the very richness of participation. The inner feeling of the dancer is the sixth sense which harnesses these five mental and mechanical elements to create the experience and enjoyment of beauty. It is the spark which gives the dancer her sense of spiritual freedom in the midst of the constraints and discipline of the dance. The *Yogi* achieves serenity through concentration that comes from discipline. The dancer brings together her feet, hands, eyes, ears and singing into a fusion which transforms the serenity of the *yogi* into a torrent of beauty. The spectator who is absorbed in intently watching this has his mind freed of distractions and feels a great sense of clarity. In their shared involvement, the dancer and the spectator are both released from the weight of worldly life, and experience the divine joy of the art with a sense of total freedom.

To experience this rare rapture, a dancer has only to willingly submit herself to discipline. It will be difficult in

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the beginning to conform to the demands and to the norms and codes of the tradition. But if she humbly submits to the greatness of this art, soon enough she will find joy in that discipline; and she will realise that discipline makes her free in the joyful realm of the art.

The greatest authorities on the dance have definitively recognised that it is the orthodoxy of traditional discipline which gives the fullest freedom to the individual creativity of the dancer.

Young dancers who go in for novelties will find that their razzle-dazzle does not last long. On the other hand, if they hold firm to the tradition, which like the Banyan strikes deep roots and spreads wide branches, they will gain for themselves and those who watch them the dignity and joy of Bharatanatyam. I come out with these submissions only because of my anxiety that they should realise this. The young will recognise the greatness of this art if they study it with intense participation, calmly and without haste.

One has to begin early and learn it for many years to reach a devout understanding of the immanent greatness of this art. Then comes the recognition of one's great good fortune in being chosen to practice this art; this recognition leads the dancer to surrender herself to her art. Such surrender makes her aware of the divinity and wholeness of Bharatanatyam. And, the art will continue to flourish without the aid of new techniques which aim at "purifying" it or changes in dress, ornament, make-up and the interpolation of new items which seek to make it more "complete." This is my prayer.

Footnotes to Chapter VII

1. Abhinaya : Mime; facial expression.
2. Bhakti : Devotion; Love of God.
3. Silappadikaram : Tamil classic of the second century A.D.

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4. The eleven dances referred to in the Silappadikaram are the (*i*) *Kodukotti* danced by Siva on the burial ground (*ii*) *Pandaranga* dance which Siva displayed before Brahma standing in His chariot (*iii*) *Alliyam* performed by Vishnu after disposing of the treacherous devices of Kamsa (*iv*) *Mallu* performed by Vishnu after the destruction of the demon Bana (*v*) *Tudi* (drum-dance) of Subrahmanya which was the war-dance of triumph, on destroying the demon Surapadma, on the heaving wave-platform of the ocean to the accompaniment of the rattle of his drum (*vi*) *Kudai* (umbrella-dance) dance by Subrahmanya lowering the umbrella before the demons who gave up their arms (*vii*) *Kudam* (pot-dance) danced by Vishnu after walking through the streets of Banasura's city (*viii*) *Pedi* danced by Kama (Cupid) (*ix*) *Marakkal* dance of Durga (*x*) *Pavai* dance of Lakshmi and the (*xi*) *Kadayam* dance of Indrani at the northern gate of Banas' city.

5. Sringara : Romantic Love, in union or separation, which is an intimation of the mystical union. Cf. Charles Williams in 'The Figure of Beatrice' :

> "..... There is no other word so convenient for describing that particular kind of sexual love..... It defines an attitude, a manner of receiving experience." Williams quotes the following passage from Wordsworth's Prelude
>
> "This spiritual love acts not nor can exist
> Without Imagination; which, in truth,
> Is but another name for absolute power,
> And keenest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And Reason in her most exalted mood"

6. Mantra sastras : Incantationary practices.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE HISTORY AND THE ORIGIN OF *THE THUMRI* WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *GHARANAS* AND STYLE

—Premlata Sharma

The *thumri* is the most popular form of Indian music cultivated by individuals, as distinguished from that spontaneous form of music cultivated by communities or social groups. It is, therefore, designated as classical music, as distinguished from folk music. It is comparatively more free of those restrictions of strict discipline which form part of orthodox classical music. For this reason it is called 'light' classical music.

As denoted by its feminine name the *thumri* is characterised by a striking note of tenderness and the theme of its songs is invariably related to some or the other phase of human love in a stage of separation or union. The *thumri* lacks that virility of musical expression associated with the *dhrupad* and *khyal* styles; we must remember that both these are masculine names. The songs in these manly styles do not always have love for their theme.

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The Origin of the *Thumri*

The most widely current theory attributes the origin of the *thumri* to the royal court of Oudh, especially that of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. This causal theory of the origin of a musical style, like all causal theories of interpretation of historical problems, is at best rather partial in its compass, if not wholly superficial. Causal theories do not take cognizance of the inner, homogeneous continuity of human affairs, to which causal factors have to be related to have any real significance. In order to understand and interpret the basic trend which made possible the evolution of the *thumri*, attention has to be paid to the continuity of fundamental trends in the Indian tradition of classical music which comes in an unbroken current from very ancient times and reflects India as an organic and vital cultural entity with a spiritual foundation too strong for any secular influence which does not owe loyalty to it.

Historically speaking, the true significance of the development of a new art form can only be grasped when its understanding is related to preceding cultural trends. Intrinsically any classical musical form has to be judged with reference to the fundamental concepts of musical theory. Indian society has nourished such a strong spiritual base for the cultivation of the arts that incompatible influences of a political or exotic kind have made only a slight, superficial and evanescent impact on the fundamental concepts of art which are rooted in the very soul of the people.

As is well-known, the theory of classical Indian music is enshrined in our traditional *Sangitashastra*. In studying any musical style and its characteristics an attempt has, therefore, to be made to relate them to the concept of musical forms as given in that *Shastra*.

The Characteristic Features of the *Thumri*

The characteristic features of the *thumri*, as a musical style, can be enumerated thus :

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(*i*) The musical effect of the *thumri* is far more dependent on its poetic content than is the case in the orthodox style of the *khayal* ;

(*ii*) The poetic theme of songs sung in this style deals most often with *Shringara Rasa*, and has sometimes a dual significance, spiritual and mundane;

(*iii*) Its lyric form is due to the restricted range of *ragas* suitable for its rendering and to its latitude of elaboration. It is, at present, the most lyrical of all forms of Indian light classical music;

(*iv*) Judged by the familiar principles of art design, 'Unity in Diversity', this farm dwells more in its melodic pattern on the element of diversity than on that of unity;

(*v*) It requires a special quality of voice, natural or cultivated, for its proper rendering;

(*vi*) Its association with the *Kathak* style of dance, looked upon as an inferior dance style, led to the exponents of this musical style being assigned a low social status until quite recently;

(*vii*) The *talas* identified with this form of music constitute one of its features;

(*viii*) The embellishments are tonal-verbal for the most part and not purely the tonal ones which preponderate in orthodox clssical music.

The *thumri* is an ephemeral evolute or a variant out of a long series of forms, beginning with the *Dhruvas* mentioned in Bharata's *Natya Shastra*.

Bharata deals with verbal-tonal rhythmic compositional patterns in the Thirty-Second Chapter of *Natya Shastra*, entitled *Dhruva-Vidhana*. He speaks of five types of *Dhruva*

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in the context of drama (*Natya*) : *Praveshiki*, *Akshepiki*, *Naishkramiki*, *Santara*, and *Prasadiki* or *Prasadini*. *Prasadini* is described as that which gives rise to colourful delight (*Rangaraga*) and self-engrossing happiness (*Prasada*). As is to be expected, this type is specially allocated to the delineation of the *Shringara Rasa*. The following lines are significant in this context :

प्रसादने संभ्रमे च तथानुस्मरणेऽपि च ।
तथातिशयवाक्येषु तथा च नवसङ्गमे ।।
गर्वे च प्रार्थने चैव शृङ्गारादद्भुतदर्शने ।
ध्रुवा प्रसादिनी कार्या तज्ज्ञैर्मध्यलयाश्रया ।।

It may incidentally be noted here that Bharata has aptly enjoined the use of *Madhya Laya* (medium tempo) in this type of *Dhruva* which is specially suited to the *Shringara Rasa*, whereas he has enjoined the *Vilambita Laya* for the *Dhruvas* suited to the *Karuna Rasa* and *Druta Laya* for those suitable for *Vira*, *Raudra* and *Adhbhuta*.

Matanga, the next important extant author after Bharata, has dealt with compositional patterns under *Prabandhadhyaya*. He speaks of *Nadavati*, a type of *Gana-Ela Prabandha*, specially, suited for the *Shringara Rasa* :

नन्दावती तृतीया च तुर्या भद्रावती स्मृता ।
ऋग्वेदादिसमुद्भूता विचित्रध्वनिरञ्जिता ।।
इत्येला गणमार्गेण बुधैरुक्ता चतुर्विधा ।
एला नादावती रम्या वर्णालङ्कारशोभिता ।।
गीयते मट्टालेन नादयुक्ता पदे पदे ।
टक्करागो भवेत् तत्र सर्वेषामनुरञ्जकः ।।
श्वेतो वर्णश्च विज्ञेयः शृङ्गारः कथितो रसः ।
कैशिकीवृत्तिराख्याता पाञ्चाली रीतिरिष्यते ।

The following characteristic features of this type of *Prabandha* can be noted from the above quotation :

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(*i*) A remarkable beauty and variegated graceful embellis ⊏ments;

(*ii*) Deployment of special rhythmic patterns (*talas*) :

(*iii*) The universal appeal of the *raga* or melodic pattern of this form. (I shall shortly review this feature in some detail);

(*iv*) The presence of the *Kaishiki Vritti* and *Panchali Riti*; the former of these, the *Kaishiki Vritti*, represents the graceful, sportive tendencies of love in drama and the latter, *Panchali Riti*, represents a special style of diction which is marked by the absence of compounds on the analogy of which it can be construed that this form makes use of short and sweet embellishments and avoids elaborate and intricate ones.

It will be interesting and useful to review the special features of the *raga* chosen for this compositional form. It may be noted that *Takka* is an important *Grama Raga* known as *Bhasajanaka*. It gives rise to a large number of *Bhasas* and *Vibhasa*. *Bhasa* is described as *Alapavishesha* or a particular variety of improvised elaboration of a *raga*. It is well-known that only a few *ragas* permit of unrestrained variety in elaboration. *Bhasas* and *Vibhasas* imply a licence for such variety as is evident from the following words of Matanga regarding these two *Gitis* or style-forms of rendering *ragas* :

प्रयोगैर्गात्रजैः श्लक्ष्णैः काकुरक्तैः सुयोजितैः ।
कम्पितैः कोमलैर्दीप्तैर्मलिवी काकुनान्वितैः ।।
ललितैः सुकुमारैश्च प्रयोगैश्च सुसंयतैः ।
भाषागीतिः समाख्याता एषा गीतिविचक्षणैः ।।
यथा वै रज्यते लोकस्तथा वै संप्रयुज्यते ।

The last line deserves special notice as it speaks of the ascendancy of *Loka- ranjakata* over all rules and regulations. Similarly he says for *Vibhasa Giti* :

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ललितैर्बहुभिर्दीप्तैः कम्पितैः रौरसैः समैः ।।
तारातितारैर्मसृणैर्मध्ये मध्यमदीपितैः ।
गमकैः श्रोतृसुखदैर्ललितैस्तु यदृच्छया ।।
विभाषागीतिस्तु संयोज्या यथा लोकोऽनुरज्यते ।

It is clear that *Rakti* or *Ranjakata* and not rule or regulation is the main consideration in *Vibhasa Giti*. Thus such *ragas*, as have been described by ancient authors as *Bhasajanaka* may be understood to permit of somewhat loosely restrained elaboration.

Sarngadeva gives a similar treatment of *Nadavati*, the type of *Prabandha* which we have just spoken of on the authority of Matanga. He also says that novelty is to be preferred to conventional rules in certain varieties of *Prabandha* forms. For example, he says :

नूतनैं रूपकं नूत्नं रागः स्थायान्तरैर्नवः ।
धातू रागांशभेदेन मातोस्तु नवता भवेत ।।

That means to say, in certain *rupakas* (compositional forms) the melodic structure (*dhatu*) is endowed with novelty through new *sthayas* which may be somewhat extraneous to the intrinsic structure of the *raga* concerned.

This element of novelty is supplied by either the latent potentialities of the *raga* itself (*Mulaja Bhasa*) or by the regional melodies known to the performer (*Desaja Bhasa*) or by the shadow of a different *raga* (*Chaya Bhasa*) or by the mixture of a number of *ragas* (*Sankirna Bhasa*).

Sarngadeva's discussion of the varieties of *Alapti*, or improvised tonal elaboration, is also interesting in this context. He divides *Alapti* into *Ragalapti* and *Rupakalapti*, the former being concerned with *Ragaprakatikarana*, that is with an unfolding of the tonal potentialities of the *raga* without any reference to the *Rupaka*, or the verbal-tonal-rhythmic pattern, and the latter being devoted to the

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Rupaka itself. Naturally, the verbal content of the *Rupaka* gets an important place in *Rupakalapti* which expresses the finer shades of significance of words through appropriate tonal variations. Viewed in terms of Sarngadeva's definitions of *Ragalapti* and *Rupakalapti*, the *thumri* has to be treated as a musical pattern of the latter form of *Alapti*, and not of the former.

A rough similarity of the *Bol-banavas* of *thumri* can be traced to the varieties of *Rupakalapti*, mentioned by Sarngadeva namely *Pratigrahanika*, *Sthayabhanjani* and *Rupakabhanjani*. When the artist's attention is concentrated more on the tonal-verbal variations with the purposes of expressing musically the suggestions implicit in the words of the songs than in the effective exposition of the *raga* concerned, there is bound to be some deviation from the conventional pattern of the *raga*. Kallinatha has beautifully explained this idea by saying that in *Rupakalapti* the *raga* concerned is just like a pearl which is set in the midst of multi-coloured gems.

Reverting to the topic of *Prabhandha*, it may be remarked that subsequent-writers after Sarngadeva either avoided a treatment of *Prabhandha* or were generally content with reproducing Sarngadeva's text on the subject almost verbatim. It is, therefore, not possible to connect the link of parallel trends with the *thumri* in our musicial tradition relative to the period between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century.

It will not be out of place to give now a short account of the trends in folk music which may be taken to have supplied the raw material for a refined and classicised light musical form like the *thumri*. The *Chaiti*, the *Biraha* and the *kajari* forms of folk music of the eastern Uttar Pradesh, as also the *Padas* and *Ramainis* of the Kabir Panthis (who have exercised a marked influence on the folk music of eastern U.P. and Bihar) may be mentioned in this connection. These must have contributed to and inspired the evolution

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of the *thumri* in Banaras. The theme of songs of the *Chaiti, Biraha* and *Kajari* is mundane love and that of the music inspired by Kabir and his followers has a double significance of spiritual and mundane love. These have considerably influenced the songs of the *thumri*, especially of the Poorbi *anga*. Some popular *thumri* songs with the following opening lines, inspired by the Kabir cult, have a double meaning of spiritual love clothed in the garb of the mundane and may be cited as an example :

बाबुल मौरा नैहर छूटोई जाय ।
मैं न लरी थी श्याम निकल गये आज ।
रे दिन कैसे कटि हैं जतन बताय जैहो ।

Songs of somewhat similar content of erotic mysticism are known as *Padams* in Karnatak music, and those having mundane love as their theme are called *Javalis* in the South. The *Lavanis* of Maharashtra are also a variety of erotic folk music. All these forms of folk music on the one hand and classical forms on the other must have made possible the evolution of light classical forms in all parts of the country as a manifestation of a spontaneous cultural movement.

The *thumri* will thus be seen as one of the varieties of light classical music emerging in its time as a result of the impact of classical music on the one hand and folk music on the other in Northern India in line with similar developments in other parts of the country and as an incident in the normal course of musical history.

As regards the special quality of voice possessed by women for rendering of light classical forms as the *thumri*, reference may be made to Sarngadeva's remarks on the subject. He mentions *Madhura, Sehala, Komala, Karuna, Snigdha, Raktimana* as qualities of the natural female voice which have generally speaking to be cultivated in the male. When Bharata wrote the following *shlokas*, he had probably

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in mind the qualities naturally to be found in males and females.

प्रायेण तु स्वभावात् स्त्रीणां गानं नृणां च वादनविधिः ।
स्त्रीणां स्वभावमधुरः कण्ठो नृणां बलत्वञ्च ।।
यः स्त्रीणां वाद्यगुणे भवति नृणांच गानमधुरत्यम् ।
ज्ञेयः सोऽलंकारो न हि स्वभावो भवति तेषाम् ।।

Bharata says that it is only natural that women should sing and that men should play on instruments, because women are endowed with a sweet voice by nature, and men with a forceful voice. If, however, men are found who are adept in singing and women who are adept in playing on instruments that should be deemed a kind of ornaments to their respective natures.

The qualities of *Komalata, Karunatva,* are not compatible with those required for singing the manly style of the *Dhrupad.* Hence the popular belief that the voice of *Dhrupad* singers is unfit for the *thumri.* This is true as a rule, though there are exceptions to be found in actual experience. For example, the late Chandan Chowbey of Mathura was a great singer of *Dhrupad* as well as of the *thumri.* Moreover, in the *Dhrupad* style itself there are the *Dhamar-Hori* forms which have an erotic content and call for *Madhurya* of voice.

Similarly Kathak dances with whom the origin of the *thumri* of Lucknow is associated do not as a rule perform the *thumri,* since the voice of dancers is said to become unfit for graceful singing. However, those dancers who do *ada* while sitting on the stage have been known to be excellent performers of the *thumri.* (This tradition of Kathak dancers is now dying out.)

Literary trends contemporary with the development of the *Thumri*

The fundamental theory of Indian classical music, as

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indeed of all Indian art and poetry, is grounded in the theory of *Nada Brahman* or *Shabda Brahman* and is thus linked with the Vedic religion. Bharata's *Natya Shastra*, based on Vedic concepts, is the Bible of all branches of Indian art and poetics. Bharata applies the same sets of rules to the triple arts of song, dance and drama. As a consequence of this basic factor, historical developments in the field of poetry, music and other arts exhibit a clearly identifiable common trend. Parallels can easily be discerned, for instance, in the fields of music and dance and poetry and may be cited to explain and elucidate developments in other fields.

The very strong upsurge of spiritual poetry centred round the divine eroticism of the Vaishnava cult (beginning with the poems of Jaideva, Vidyapati, Chandidasa, Gyanadasain and others in the eastern parts of the country and of Suradasa, Nandadasa, Kumbhanadasa and Haridasa Swami in the western) released literary torrents which inundated Northern India with works depicting amorous sentiments. The period is known as the *Riti-kala* of literature. Kesava, Bihari, Matirama, Deva, Padmakara and Ghananada were the representative poets of this period.

This poetic literature gradually came to be appreciated by middle-class society. Soon the need must have been felt for a form of music which would be fit for cultivation by this social stratum and which could be used for expressing the popular poetry of the period.

Parallel developments are clearly evident in the fields of the three arts of poetry, music and dance. All these three have an erotic bias. This is a fact which militates against any theory ascribing to the Nawabs of Oudh the origin of the *thumri*.

Thus the *thumri* was a form of music that evolved during the course of the development of the three arts of music, poetry and dance. It cannot be studied in isolation from allied

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currents. The poetry of this class of people was neither pedantic nor commonplace; it represented a compromise between two extremes. A similar development took place in the musical field blending the two extremes of orthodox classical music and folk music. Thus a social need was supplied by the *thumri*.

The *thumri* was thus expressive in music of the prevailing trend in poetry. A similar development took place in the field of dance. The Kathak variety is a compromise between orthodox forms and the folk dance.

Aesthetic value

In its aesthetic content the *thumri* abounds in the *Madhuryaguna* and *Prasadaguna*, but lacks *Ojas*. There should be no objection to the use of literary concepts in musical analysis since our *Sangitashastra* has bodily borrowed its aesthetic terminology from the field of literature and has no independent aesthetic terminology of its own. *Madhurya* brings about melting of the heart. *Chittadruti* and *Prasada* instantaneously permeate the whole consciousness. *Ojas*, on the other hand, is known for brightening or exciting the heart, (*Chittadiptikarakah*), leading to *atma-vistriti* or *self-exceeding*. Mammata speaks of these three aesthetic qualities or *gunas* in the following verses :

आह्लादकत्वं माधुर्यं शृङ्गारे द्रुतिकारणम् ।
करुणे विप्रलम्भे तच्छान्ते चातिशयान्वितम् ।।
दीप्त्यात्मविस्तृतेर्हेतुरोजो वीररसस्थिति ।
वीभत्सरौद्ररसयोस्तस्याधिक्यं क्रमेण च ।।
शुष्केन्धनाग्निवत् स्वच्छजलवत् सहसैव यः ।
व्याप्नोत्यन्यत् प्रसादोऽसौ सर्वत्र विहितस्थिति ।।

According to Mammata, *Samyoga*, *Shringara*, *Karuna*, *Viyoga Shringara* and *Shanta* are graded in the ascending order of this enumeration for excellence and abundance of *Madhurya*. *Karuna* (as distinct from *Vipralambha Shringara*

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and *Shanta rasas*) rarely constitutes the theme of *thumri* songs. According to Mammata's aesthetics, therefore, the *thumri* of *Viyoga Shringara* has to be rated higher than that of *Samyoga Shringara* and the *bhajan* which delineates *Shanta rasa* has to be ranked higher than the *thumri*. Before passing on to a discussion of the *gharanas* and styles of the *thumri*, it will be more convenient to conclude the foregoing discussions in the following summary.

Concluding remarks on the History and Origin of the *Thumri*

From the account of the origin and history of the *thumri* given in the foregoing paragraphs, it can be concluded that the main characteristics of the *thumri* are : latitude in elaboration of the *ragas*; a predominance of the amorous sentiment in songs; greater emphasis on verbal-tonal embellishments rather than on purely tonal ones; a preference for the feminine voice. These are all features of light musical patterns recognised by the traditional *Sangitashastra*. This means that styles resembling the *thumri* must have been in vogue from times immemorial and the *thumri* must have had a parent style and owing to the absence of notated records no definite information is available about them. It has, therefore, to be deemed as one of the ephemeral popular upsurges in the domain of classical music. The fact of royal patronage of the popular varieties of music is not to be treated as indicative of the genesis of those varieties. Royal patronage is to be viewed as an incident in the development of this style, and should not be exaggerated as a genetic element independent of the current of a spontaneous art movement of musical expression of the people.

The *thumri* marks one of the occasional manifestations of the indigenous trends in forms and modes of musical expression. The desire for freedom from the rigid restraint of the rules of orthodox classical music, or the urge to pre-

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fer *Rakti* or *Ranjakta* to the sobriety or solemnity of orthodox styles, asserts itself normally in society and cannot be attributed to any single causal historical factor. The *thumri* is an example of this perpetual musical urge in human nature. The rigorous disciplines of classical music appeal to a smaller group in any civilised society, and larger groups desire to cultivate less exacting disciplines.

Style forms which originate from this kind of urge of that musical strata which constitute the dividing line between the aristocracy of orthodox classical music on the one hand and the ordinary folk music of the masses on the other, appear and re-appear in history. They appear with variations from the preceding forms, in line with the styles of orthodox classical music and of folk music. The *thumri* may be rated lower in the scale of standards of orthodox classical music, but it has an important place in our social life. It is significant that the *thumri* or its religious counterpart, the *bhajan*, is an almost essential part of a musical concert these days. And without it no musical treat is deemed completely satisfactory.

The *Gharanas* and Styles of the *Thumri*

As regards the *gharanas* of the *thumri*, it must be stated at the outset that there appear to be no special *gharanas* of this style-form of Indian music resembling the *gharanas* of *Dhrupad* or *khayal* or those which can be associated with the names of their founders or originators. This is the view of all the living musicians whom I have met. Before writing this paper, I specially interviewed Shrimati Vidyadhari Bai, the great exponent of this style. She is now over eighty years of age. What she told me confirmed the fact that there never have been any exclusively *thumri gharanas*.

No performing musician is known to have attained eminence in the Indian musical world solely on the strength of his rendering of the *thumri*. All the musicians celebrated for their merit in the excellent rendering of *thumri* have

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primarily been exponents of the *khayal* style. The finer shades of rendering the *thumri* as practised by eminent musicians have never been individualised as distinct *gharanas* of *thumri* singers; they have always been identified with the *gharanas* of the *khayal* style to which particular musicians owed allegiance.

For example, the late Khan Sahib Abdul Karim Khan, and Khan Sahib Faiyaz Khan, the best known exponents of the *thumri* in recent times owed allegiance to the Kirana and Agra *gharanas* respectively. They are not known as the founders of any *gharanas* of *thumri* singing as separate from their *khayal gharanas*, notwithstanding the fact that their rendering of the *thumri* had a much greater appeal for average listeners than their singing of the *khayal*.

Although *gharanas* are absent in the *thumri* forms, two regional styles are quite well-known : the Poorbi and Pachahin *angas*, identified broadly with the eastern and western parts of Uttar Pradesh respectively. Banaras has been the centre of the former and Lucknow of the latter. The Poorbi *anga* is in vogue in the whole of eastern U.P., some regions of western U.P., for example the Vrajapradesha and in Bihar. It has all along been favoured by the musicians of Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The Pachahin *anga* has been confined more or less to the districts of Lucknow, Moradabad, Saharanpur, Meerut and Delhi.

The differentiating element of these two styles has been that whereas the Poorbi *anga* is characterised by a certain grace, tenderness, sweetness and elegance of rendering and flexibility of tonal embellishments, the Pachahin *anga* is comparatively less tender and somewhat less elastic. This distinction is prominent equally in the dialectical peculiarities of the regions with which the two styles are identified. The tonal tenderness of *Vrajabhasha* or the *Bhojpuri* dialect which are the media or expression of the *thumri* in the Poorbi *anga* is

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in marked contrast with the toughness of *Khariboli* which is the medium of the Pachahin *anga*. Apart from the distinctions of tonal quality there is a further distinction in the thought content of songs of the two *angas*.

In addition to the Poorbi and Pachahin *angas* of the *thumri* there is a third style known as the Punjabi *anga* which has become quite popular nowadays. Khan Sahib Bade Ghulam Ali Khan is known as the most outstanding exponent of this style. The style is of quite recent development, if not origin. The ancestors or predecessors of contemporary singers of this style of the *thumri* were all musicians belonging to the *gharanas* of the *khayal*. The most notable characteristic of this style is the influence which it bears of the *tappa* style form which originated in the Punjab. This is probably the reason why the style has been given its name.

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A profuse deployment of successive tonal embellishments, that is elaborate turns and trials (*murkis*, woven into *tana* patterns) in quick tempo, which is a characteristic feature of the *tappa* has been adopted as its feature in the Punjabi *anga* of the *thumri*. Although the Poorbi *anga* singers also use *murkis* of the *tappa anga*, they do it with better grace and less elaboration. Another peculiarity of the Punjabi *anga* is its most frequent rendering of the Pahari pattern of melody.

This brief account of the styles of the *thumri* may be concluded with the remarks that the Poorbi, Punjabi and Pachahin *angas* deserve to be graded in a descending order when we apply the criterion of sweetness, grace and popular appeal.

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CHAPTER IX

THE EVOLUTION OF THE *THUMRI*

—Jaideva Singh

The *thumri* is a form of *nritya* music of which *abhinaya* or acting was an indispensable component. I am using the word *nritya* advisedly, for it is untranslatable in any other language. Its connotation will be clear in contrast with *nritta* and *natya*. *Nritta* is simply gestures and movements of definite patterns based on *laya* and *tala*. *Nritya* combines with this *abhinaya*, which means communication of *bhava* and *rasa*, and may be roughly translated as acting. *Natya* is acting without *laya* and *tala*. In *nritta*, there is neither song nor acting, but there are gestures, poses, and movements based on *laya* and *tala*. When this is combined with a song and *abhinaya*, it is called *nritya*. So the essential constituents of *nritya* are (*a*) gestures and movements based on *tala* (*b*) song (*c*) *abhinaya* or acting. In *natya*, too, there is *abhinaya*, but it is not associated with *tala*. Also the modes of *abhinaya* in *nritya* and *natya* are different. A song is not essential to *natya*, but dialogue, generally in prose, is absolutely essential. It represents certain *patra-s* or *dramatis personae*. *Nritta* or *nritya* may be used in *natya* to embellish or heighten its effects. *Nritya* is not a constituent of *natya*, but an *avantara-padartha*, *i.e.*, something introduced in it to

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heighten its effect, and *nritta* is utilized for embellishment (*shobhahetutvena*). The English word 'dance' may be a synonym for *nritta*, but cannot do justice to the connotation of *nritya*. Some scholars have suggested 'representational dance' as an equivalent for *nritya*. French Indologists have suggested 'danse communicante or danse communicatrice' as equivalents for *nritya*.

It is mentioned in Chapter IV of Bharata's *Natya Shastra* (p. 90—Vol. I of Gaekwad's Oriental Series) that Shiva suggested to Brahma as to how *nritya* could be utilized in *natya* :

महागीतेषु चैवार्थान्सम्यगेवाभिनेष्यसि ।

(You may communicate by this means the emotional content of the songs that are sung in the *purva-ranga* or the preliminary of a drama.)

Abhinavagupta in his *Abhinava-bharati* (p. 180 of the Second Edition of *Natya Shastra*) quotes Kohala as giving the origin of *nritya* :

सन्ध्यायां नृत्यतः शम्भोर्भक्त्याऽऽर्द्रो नारदः पुरा ।
गीतवांस्त्रिपुरोन्माथं तच्चित्तस्त्वथगीतके ।
चकराभिनयं प्रीतस्ततस्तण्डुं च सोऽब्रवीत् ।
नाट्योक्तयाभिनयेनेदं वत्स योजय ताण्डवम् ।।

In times gone by, while Shiva was dancing in the evening, Narada full of devotion sang in front of him a song, the subject-matter of which was the destruction of the demon Tripura. Shiva's mind was so absorbed in the content of the song that he was full of delight and acted out the content (*chakarabhinayam*). Then he said to his pupil, Tandu, "Dear one, in future, combine with your dance the *abhinaya* that I have taught you in connection with *natya* so that the thought-content of a song could be communicated to others by acting."

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Kohala is generally placed in the third or fourth century A.D. He has used the word '*pura*' (*i.e.*, the distant past) in describing the origin of *nritya*, which clearly shows that there was a long tradition behind it.

There were three factors in *nritya* : dance, song and acting. Dasharupa says clearly :

भावाभिनयहीनं तु नृत्तमित्यभिधीयते ।
रसभावव्यंजनादियुक्तं नृत्यमितीर्यते ।।

It was not only, *abhinaya*, but also music, both vocal and instrumental, which was an essential part of *nritya*. K.M. Verma says very rightly in his book '*Natya, Nritta* and *Nritya* : "It may be further pointed out that almost all the *music* is essential in *nritya* which is comparatively quite unimportant and optional too in the case of *natya*" (p. 70).

The *nritya*, consisting of dance, song, and *abhinaya*, was used in the *purvaranga* or the preliminaries of a drama, and *uparupaka-s*, but it was also practised as an independent art by itself. K.M. Verma says very correctly on page 41 of his book already referred to :

"*Uparupaka-s* may be covered by *nritya* but the word *uparupaka* does not fully include all the possibilities of *nritya*, for the obvious reason that *if a single piece of song or verse, however, short, is enacted or communicated with the help of a given technique, that would be* nritya." That it was practised as an independent art is evident from Kalidasa's drama *Malavikagnimitram*.

There were two dance teachers employed in the court of King Agnimitra, Ganadasa and Haradatta. Each considered himself superior to the other. The King was anxious to see Malavika and her art. In order to bring Malavika before the King, it was given out to the teachers that the superiority of the teacher would be decided by the excel-

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lence of the performance of his pupil. Malavika is brought in, and this is what the poet says about her :

मालविका—(उपगानं कृत्वा चतुष्पदवस्तु गायति ।)
दुर्लभः प्रियस्तस्मिन्भव हृदय निराशम् ।
अहो अपाङ्गको मे प्रस्फुरति किमपि वामः ।
एष स चिरदृष्ट कथमुपनेतव्यो
नाथ मां परधीनां त्वयि गणय सतृष्णाम् ।।

And the poet adds—

ततो यथारसमभिनयति ।

She sings a little *alapana* by way of prelude, and then a piece consisting of four parts. After this she acts out according to the *rasa* of the piece, which was in this case *vipralambhashringara*. Here the *nritya* was no part of a drama. It was an independent piece and the sentiment of the song used in it was communicated by acting in consonance with the *rasa* of the piece.

That Malavika's performance involved dance, song and acting is evident from the appreciation of Parivrajika who says :

यथादृष्टं सर्वमनवद्यम् । कुतः ।
अंगैरन्तर्निहितवचनैः सूचितः सम्यगर्थः
पादन्यासो लयमनुगतस्तन्मयत्वं रसेषु ।
शाखायोनिर्मृदुरभिनयस्तद्विकल्पानुवृत्तौ ।
भावो भावं नुदति विषयाद्रागबन्धः स एव ।।

("As witnessed by me, her performance was faultless. Why ? Because of the *artha* or sense. (The commentator adds appropriately *arthogitarthah* : '*artha*' here means 'the sense of the song.' The sense of the song was expressed by the limbs in such a way that it appeared as if they embodied the very words of the song. The steps followed closely the

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musical timing. She became one with the *rasa-s* she gave expression to. The acting by means of the hand was very gentle and charming. Though in the successive stages of the *abhinaya*, there was an expression of various emotions, the predominant sentiment was preserved throughout.")

It is evident from this description that there was an art form which used dance and acting to communicate the sense of the song to the listeners. This may be called *nritya sangita*. It was utilized in the *purva-ranga* of the *natya*, in the *uparupaka-s*, but also throve as an independent art.

Kalidasa could not have given such a glowing description of it, if it had not enjoyed an honoured place in the musical systems of the country. The data of Kalidasa is variously given by various scholars. Even if we suppose it to be 400 A.D., the art must have flourished about 200 years earlier in order to acquire such prestige.

This *nritya* or *abhinaya sangita* was of two types—*marga* and *deshi* or regional. *Thumri* was just a *deshi* variety of this type of music and was prevalent in Uttar Pradesh and Vihara. From here it spread to other parts of India. We do not have before us any example of its earlier form; but, for the last 200 years or so, it has always been a song associated with dance and acting. It was practised mostly by *Bai-s* or dancing girls, *Kathika-s*, and *Bhand-s*. (Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the correct word is *Kathak* or *Kathika* and not *Katthaka*.) They sang and depicted in dance forms various *Katha-s*, and hence got the same name Kathak or Kathika which means a narrator. Both these words will be found in Apte's Sanskrit-English Dictionary. The word is derived from the root *Kath* which means 'to narrate.' It has nothing to do with *Kattha* or Catechu. Similarly the word *Bhanda*, in the sense of jester or buffoon, is a Sanskrit word derived from the root *Bhand*, to jest. These are very old institutions, and do not owe their origin to Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow, as some people

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wrongly suppose. He flourished in the nineteenth century and was deported to Calcutta in 1856. He surely patronised these arts and may have helped in their development. He was also himself a good composer of *thumri-s*.

Some scholars believe that the very word *thumri* is derived from *thuma*, which means dance steps. Whatever the origin of the word, it has always been associated with dance and acting.

There are two types of *thumri* : (*a*) *Bol-bant-ki-thumri*, which is also known as *Bandish-ki-thumri* and (*b*) *Bol-banao-ki-thumri*. The *Bol-bant-ki-thumri* is expressly adapted for dance and its beauty lies in rhythmic variations and leap notes. This is sung for the dancer by one or more of the accompanists in fast or medium tempo while he or she does the *abhinaya* or acts out the emotional content of the song.

I shall cite a few examples. The first one is *Koyaliya kooka sunava* in the *raga* Khamach. It is divided into five parts for *abhinaya*. The first one is *Koyaliya kooka sunave*. The dancer imagines that a cuckoo is perched on a tree and is warbling its two-fold notes and acts the idea out while dancing. The second part is *Sakhi re mohe viraha satave*. In this he or she acts out the pangs of separation from the lover. The third part is *Piya bina kacchu na sohave* (nothing appeals to me without my lover). In this dejection is expressed by *abhinaya*. The fourth part is *Nishi andhiyari kari vijari chamake* (lightning flashes in the dark night). This is also expressed by suitable *abhinaya*. It may be noticed how the flash of lightning is expressed in the very notes to which the words *Nishi andhiyari kari vijari chamake* are set. The last part, *Jiyara more darapave* is also composed in such a way as to bring out the sense of fright and it is also expressed through *abhinaya*.

Take another example of this type of *thumri* in *raga* Kaphi in medium tempo, *Jani jani tere mana ki bata*. This

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is again adapted for dance and *abhinaya*, and sounds like a *gati* of the sitar.

Here is another example in *raga* Bhairavi, *Kaisi ye bhalai re kanhai*. It sounds like a *chhota khayal* and is, as a matter of fact, sung both like a *chhota khayal* and *thumri*.

Rhythmic effect is the forte of this type of *thumri*. It is about such music that Susanne Langer said in her *Feeling and Form*, "Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible."

We turn now to the *Bol-banao-ki-thumri*. This is *banao* or *alapti* with the *bol* or wording of the song. While the *Bol-bant-ki-thumri* is sung in accompaniment to the dance, the *Bol-banao-ki-thumri* is sung *after* a dance piece, but the *abhinaya* or acting is there. The *Bol-bant-ki-thumri* is sung in fast or medium tempo; the *Bol-banao-ki-thumri* is sung in slow tempo. In *Bol-bant-ki-thumri*, the *abhinaya* continues throughout : in *Bol-banao-ki-thumri*, it emerges towards the end when the *laggi* starts or the tempo is made a bit fast.

The *dhruvapada* and *khayal* are *svara-pradhana-gayaki*, that is, vocal music in which prominence is given to the *svara* or musical note and the *bol* or wording is secondary. *Thumri* is *Bol-pradhana-gayaki*, that is, vocal music in which prominence is given to the *bol* or wording, and the musical notes are turned, twisted, moulded and modulated so as to bring out the emotional content of the song, The text or poetic quality of the song determines the melody. The devices used for the emotional expression are *jhataka*, *khataka*, *gitkiri*, *minda*, *darda*, and *pukara*. All this can be put in two simple words from *Sangita-Shastra*, *gamaka-s* or subtle graces and *kaku* or modulation of voice.

Generally the thought-content of the song in this type of *thumri* is supported by singing a *doha*, or *sher*, or *kavita*, *savaiya* which has similar ideas.

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Some of these may be illustrated in the following *thumri* : *Kase Kahun ji kī batiyan*. It is in *raga* Khamach.

Emotional expression is the main characteristic of this type of *thumri*. This is achieved by proper note-production. Here is a song in the *raga* Tilaka Kamod as given by Pandit Bhatkhande in the third part of his *Kramika*. It is generally sung as a *chhota khayal*. I am reproducing it along with its notation as given in the book.

स	ग रे		ग रे
नि। . नि स	रे ग रे प	म गरे स रे	म ग (स) नि
दु ख वा मैं	का ऽ सें क	हूं ऽऽ मो रि	स ज नी ऽ
२	०	३	X
म			
रे रे म प	प प प नि	नि सं - रें	सं नि ध पध
त र प त	र प नि क	स जा ऽ त	जि या पि याऽ
२	०	३	X
	गरे	नि	प
(म)गरे सरे	म ग स नि	स नि ध नि	ध पध म गरे
वि नऽ कल	ना हिं प रे	ए क घ रि	प लऽ छि नऽ
२	०	३	X
रे			
सा रे नि सा			
दु ख वा मैं			
२			

Just see how this can be converted into a *thumri* with practically the same notes, but with different note-production.

We see then that *thumri* is a style of singing associated with dance and *abhinaya*. The classicists and the elite looked down upon it firstly because it did not adhere very rigidly to the purity of the *raga* and secondly because it involved dancing and acting. Even the *thumri* singers, who sing it to-day without any *abhinaya*, sang it with *abhinaya* about twenty years ago. I have myself witnessed the performance

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of *thumri* by Shri Shambhoo Maharaj, Smt. Rasoolan Bai, and Smt. Siddheshwari with full *abhinaya*.

The *Bol-bant-ki-thumri* has practically gone out of vogue, because its very composition was meant for dance, and without the dance, it hardly leaves scope for elaboration. As I have already said, there was *abhinaya*, too, in *Bol-banao-ki-thumri* in the concluding portion where the *laggi* started. Now there is *laggi* bereft of the *abhinaya*.

The present style of singing *thumri* started with those great masters who wanted to sing *thumri* because of its inherent potentiality for emotional expression, but did not want to take to dance or acting. They felt that if the notes were used with proper modulation, they would themselves communicate to the listeners the emotional content of the song, and so acting was not necessary. Bhaiya Ganpat Rao, Shymalal Khatri, Muazzuddin Khan are some of the artists who gave this orientation to *thumri*. And that is how *Bol-banao-ki-thumri* has survived.

As a matter of fact, this type of *thumri* has blazed a new trail in our music. It emphasizes emotional expression, and this style is used even in *bhajan* and instrumental music where it is called *thumri ang se gana* or *bajana*, that is singing or playing in the *thumri* vein.

Thumri is a purely romantic-style of music. Classical art lays emphasis on the beauty of form; the romantic style lays stress on the beauty of content, enhanced by suggestiveness and association. Prof. William James says very rightly in *The Principles of Psychology*.

"Complex suggestiveness, the awakening of vistas of memory and association, and the stirring of our flesh with picturesque mystery and gloom, make a work of art *romantic*. The classic taste brands these effects as coarse and tawdry, and prefers the naked beauty of the optical and auditory sensations, unadorned with frippery or foliage. To the romantic mind, on the contrary, the immediate beauty of these sensations seems dry and thin."

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CHAPTER X

THE MUSICAL EVOLUTION OF THE *GAZAL*

—Ashok Ranade

The *gazal* is perhaps the most popular form of Hindustani light music, in its vocal variety. As a form, it partakes of both literary and musical features and presents a rather complex picture in so far as its musical evolution is concerned.

For many reasons its musical evolution has not been properly traced. Firstly, the recorded versions of *gazal-singing* do not go back to more than seventy-five years. This means that it is only very late in its historical career that the *gazal* provides us with any evidence of how it was actually sung and so the recordings are perhaps not very useful in helping us to trace its early development. The *gazal* developed in the background of the *dhrupad-dhamar* and the *khayal* and parallel with the *thumri*. Obviously the *gazal* had accumulated a rich musical tradition around it at least since the fourteenth century and this tradition must have gone into its shaping. But no direct evidence of the process is available.

Musical literature, too, is silent in this respect. Firstly,

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the form was associated with the class of singing girls who did not enjoy a position of respect in the society of the time. Secondly, the form is usually considered as falling in the category of light music and hence our musicologists and theoreticians may perhaps be blamed for being quite thorough in their treatment of it but not very accommodative. Thirdly, it was discussed in detail as a literary form and perhaps that created the impression that the *gazal* had received an exhaustive treatment. To discuss its musical aspect on the basis of the available recordings seems to be advisable, though somewhat risky for, comparatively speaking, only a few specimens are available.

Musically speaking, the *gazal* seems to have evolved in three stages. They are the stages of metre-orientation, *thumri*-orientation and song-orientation. In spite of some degree of overlapping, the stages are clearly discernible in the recorded versions. When it was not advanced musically, the sung version of the *gazal* stuck to its metre in a rather rigid fashion. It was sung in a fast tempo; it lacked musical elaboration and also rhythmic variation. Quite often similar tunes were used, and without any change, for *gazals* which differed considerably in content. All metre is cyclical and thus it suggests beats that can be organized into a *tala*. Even so. to follow the beats too regularly amounts to a negation of musical creativity, although it does offer proof of a strict adherence to prosody. *Katil To Mere Dil* by Malka Jan of Agra and *Parda Nahi Hai* by Pyare Saheb are impressive examples of such adherence to prosody. There is no musical improvisation as such. Music is so regularly and exactly channelized that it ceases to flow. The experience is more that of a recital than of a song set to tune so that it may be remembered. The metrically-oriented *gazal* is a musical recitation determined by prosody in which the singer is obviously reluctant to deviate from the metrical beats which totally control the expression.

The earliest signs of any conscious attempt to win

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freedom from these prosodic shackles are discernible in Gohar Jan, Shamshad Bai, Pyare Saheb, Bai Sundarabai, and others. In her *Jaban Khuli Bhi* Gohar Jan's performance reminds one of the Bal Gandharva type of *tana* patterns. They are fast, straight and vigorous; they are executed with admirable clarity. The patterns seem quite simple but a close analysis betrays traces of the intricacy of design which is the hall-mark of the *tappa*. This form of Hindustani Music gained stature in the seventeenth century. Shamshad bai and Bai Sundarabai are undisputedly Begam Akhtar's predecessors in so far as they have a masculine and sensuous touch in their voices. They also show an inclination towards an evocative, verbal articulation. Shamshadbai sings *Bamulke Dilbari* in a voice which is full of strength and Sundarabai does the same in *Gam Nahi*. Pyare Saheb made a distinct mark as a singer and experimenter. He amazes us on account of his unnaturally high-pitched voice and wide repertoire. His *Parda Nahi Hain* is typically metre-oriented. But in his *Yaar Ki Koi Khabar* he sings in an astonishingly slow tempo though the rhythm kept by the *tabla* is, in keeping with the usual tradition, fast enough. All these are attempts at a *thumri*-oriented style of *gazal*, which is truly realized in the music of Barkat Ali and Begum Akhtar.

A sub-classification seems to be unavoidable in the sphere of the *thumri*-oriented *gazal*. Barkat Ali's effort is replete with the *tappa* accent. Begum Akhtar's is not. Barkat Ali bursts upon the scene like a fresh force. His Patiala style is a combination of intricate and fast tonal patterns and thus an evocative and emotive use of words becomes possible. The tempo slackens and instruments like the harmonium and the *swarmandala* do not accompany the vocalist with mechanical regularity, but with a sense of mood and creation. Barkat Ali dazzles and moves at the same time. His *Ek Sitam* is a true representation of the *tappa*-accented and *thumri*-oriented *gazal*.

In Begum Akhtar there is a clearer awareness of the existence of untapped musical sources. A greater variety of

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ragas is used and with amazing flexibility. One finds *Bhoop*, *Mand*, *Gara*, *Tilak Kamod*, *Mishra Bahar* and scores of other *ragas* exploited with a probing sensibility. There is a lot of improvisation and in the *thumri*-oriented thematic elaboration, one notices the unmistakable stamp of the individual artist. There is no dichotomy splitting the artist-composer and the artist-performer. She is fused into one self. *Gam Ki Daulat*, *Wafa Nahin*, *Dil Ki Bat* or *Na Socha Na Samza* are examples of the *thumri*-oriented *gazal* in the real sense of the word.

Saigal and Malika Pukharaj illustrate the movement towards the song-oriented *gazal*. There is no improvisation but there are deliberate and planned tonal movements and pauses along with a slow tempo which allows the music to sink into one's consciousness. The instrumentation is slight, but the tendency towards orchestration is marked. The trend culminates in the post-Saigal period in Lata Mangeshkar, Suman Kalyanpur, Mohammad Rafi, Farida Khanum, Mehendi Hasan (the last two are from Pakistan) and others. In this phase one becomes aware of a larger and more planned presence of tonal colour through careful orchestration. There are obviously more instruments and the technique of harmonization is consiously used. The composer's presence is felt in the tonal and rhythmic element of the compositions. It is intricate and imaginative. For example, *Koi Ummeed Bar Nahin Ati* by Lata Mangeshkar, *Koi Din Gar Jindgani Aur Hain* by Suman Kalyanpur are impressively complex compositions. One cannot hum these after a single listening. The tunes do not appear to have sprung from any particular *raga*. The *raga* is only a fleeting shadow. More often than not the *raga* is only an excuse for a deviation or serves as the original stimulus for the composition. But the composition, as a whole, prefers not to get bogged down in a *raga*. The performance seems to be fastidiously planned and executed and any 'feeling' on the part of the singer makes sure entries and exits. Nothing is left to chance, or to the mood of the moment. The

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stakes are too high to permit such a procedure. Interestingly enough, it is only at the song-oriented stage that we find *gazals* of high poetic merit being sung. Earlier on the artists were of a high calibre but the *gazals* betrayed a poor poetic standard. This was because it is only in a song that the word-content assumes an importance equal to that of the tonal-content. The song is a balancing act between meaning and music. In a song they interact; neither is passive. It is not as though Galib is sung more often because of his centenary year. He is sung because the *gazal* has now developed into a song-oriented, musical expression.

Mehendi Hasan and Farida Khanum deserve special analysis. Both have good voices and they do *not* sing in a high pitch. Their singing is relaxed and assured and the listener experiences a soothing sensation Our music directors and composers are still fascinated by the brilliance of the high pitch, which itself was a reaction against the uniform base of the Saigal era. But in doing so, they lose sight of the fact that the low pitch often permits a greater range and fullness of voice. There is less flash but more resonance in it. It also lends itself to an easier acceptance of the song because here the song seems to be within the reach of all voices. In addition, it affords a wider variety of tonal shades. *Na Gavao Nav Ki Neem Kash* by Mehendi Hasan and *Na Rava Kahia* by Farida Khanum prove the efficacy of the low pitch.

The song-oriented *gazal* seems to have reached its zenith. Even though the development of a musical form is in no way predictable, it seems plausible that the *gazal* will now move to a Free-Song stage where there will be no *tala*

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CHAPTER XI

KOOTIYATTAM
(A General Survey)

—K. Kunjunni Raja

The Kootiyattam[1] of Kerala is perhaps the only form of the ancient Sanskrit drama that survives in performance today. It has been kept alive in the temple theatres of Kerala (which are known as Koothampalams) by members of the Chakyar and Nambyar communities. The Kootiyattam has a continuous tradition extending for more than a thousand years. A close comparative study of the stage practice of this theatre, with the prescriptions given in detail in Bharata's *Natyashastra* and the references to the actual staging of Sanskrit play found in later works like the *Kuttanimata*, reveals that the Kerala tradition of staging Sanskrit plays follows, on the whole, the procedure adopted in other parts of India in ancient times. At the same time, it points to various special features mostly developed in Kerala to suit the taste of the audiences there. A detailed analysis of the descriptive and historical aspects of the Kootiyattam, is, therefore, essential for an understanding of the ancient Sanskrit stage in India.

The history of the Sanskrit stage in Kerala goes back to

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at least the tenth century A.D. This is when King Kulasehkhara Varman of Mahodayapura, the author of the two dramas *Subhadradhananjaya* and *Tapatisamvarana*, is said to have reformed the Sanskrit stage with the help of a Brahmin scholar, who was popularly known as Tolan, and may probably be identified as the author of the *Vyangya* commentaries on them. King Kulashekhara Varman's innovations included the introduction of the Malyalam language by the Vidushaka to explain the Sanskrit and Prakrit passages on the texts. The Vidushaka often used a macaronic Sanskrit-Malayalam, a mixed language called *Manipravala*. In the case of the Prakrit passages recited by him or by others in his presence, he used to give the Sanskrit *Chaya* (rendering) and then explain its meaning in Malayalam. He also added his own parodies or *Pratishlokas* of some of the verses recited by the hero in his presence. He often inserted *Chayashlokas* or parallel passages, referring to his own condition.

Another innovation was the humorous element which consisted of such extraneous matter as the parody on the *Purusharthas*. This formed part of the narration of the early life (*Nirvahana*) of the Vidushaka. The four *Purusharthas*, sanctified by tradition, are replaced by the four aims of existence of a corrupt society. These are described as *Asana* (food), *Vinoda* (enjoyment of sexual pleasures), *Vanchana* (deception) and *Rajaseva* (serving a king). The Vidushaka is the most prominent and the most popular figure in Kootiyattam and Koothu. In course of time he came to overshadow all the other characters in a play.

Didactic and cultural elements were gradually introduced; stories from the epics and Puranas were added—and sometimes even when they were quite irrelevant—so that the stage was used in an interesting manner as a vehicle for adult education and for the moral uplift of the people.

Thus in the *Mantraka* scene of the *Pratijnayaugandharayana* of Bhasa the Vidushaka is made to approach the

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mother of King Udayana and to console her by narrating the story of Rama. The Vidushaka expounded Puranic episodes, lacing the didactic element with humour, and making veiled references to contemporary problems. His role in a play developed as an independent temple art called Koothu; it included the exposition of Puranic stories without connecting them in any rigorous manner with a drama. The Koothu came to be performed in the temple theatres by the Chakyar dressed as the Vidushaka. This type of story-telling when it was performed outside the temple precincts by others came to be called *Pathaka*. Several Sanskrit texts were written by scholars like Melpputtur Narayana Bhatta for such expositions of Puranic stories.

The Kootiyattam is a form of art restricted to the temple; it is performed only in the Koothampalams or theatres within the precincts of temples and enacted by members of the Chakyar and Nambyar communities. The role of the hero or other male characters can be played only by a Chakyar. The women of the Chakyar community, who are called *Illottamma*, have nothing to do with the stage. The role of the heroine and other female characters is to be taken by the Nangyar, the women of the Nambyar community. The vocal music is also supplied by Nangyars, who keep the *tala* with the *Kuzhitala* cymbals. The Nambyar plays on the *Mizhavu* drum. He also acts as the *sutradhara* for the introductory *purappad* and narrates in brief (in Malayalam) the story which is to be enacted.

At a time only a single act from a drama is staged. The actual staging of a whole act lasts three to five nights; the introduction of characters (*Nirvahana*) and the preliminaries alone often take up twenty to thirty days. Of the popular scenes, *Mantraka* (Act Three of Bhasa's *Pratijnayaugandharayana*) is the most important and is depicted very elaborately. Shaktibhadra's *Ascharyachudamani; Subhadradhananjaya* and *Tapatisamvarana*, the two plays of Kulashekhara Varman; *Mattavilasa prahasana* by the Pallava King

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Mahendravikrama and some more plays ascribed to Bhasa like *Abhisheka*, *Pratima* and *Svapnavasavadatta* and Harsha's *Nagananda* are also in the Chakyar's repertoire. Stage manuals for *Bhagavadajjukiya* are available. There is a tradition that *Shakuntala* used to be staged in former times.

Probably the all-India tradition of staging Sanskrit plays was revived by the Pallava kings of South India in the sixth and seventh centuries, and it spread to Kerala from there. The Kerala tradition says that King Kulashekhara Varman revived and reformed the Sanskrit Stage. This means that it must have been in existence even earlier. The terms *Koothu* (dance) and *Chakaiyan* (dancer) are found in the ancient Tamil classic *Cilappatikaram;* but it is not certain whether these had anything to do with the staging Sanskrit plays.

Koothampalam is the Malayalam name used for the theatre structures in the precincts of temples in Kerala where single acts of select Sanskrit plays are staged. It corresponds to the *natyamandapa* of Sanskrit texts. More than a dozen such theatres are still preserved in various temples; the present structures of the Koothampalams are not much older than three hundred years, but the tradition of staging goes back to much earlier times. The theatre at the Vatakkunnatha temple at Trichur is the largest. Most of the Koothampalams are rectangular; the interior stage structure within the auditorium is square in shape. Chengannoor had an oval-shaped theatre, but now only its base is extant. These theatres do not conform strictly to the directions found in the *Natyashastra*, but follow the main rules of construction laid down in the Sanskrit texts of Kerala like the *Tantrasamucchaya* (fifteenth century) of Narayana and the *Shilparatna* of Shrikumara (sixteenth century). Koothampalams still stand at the Vatakkunnatha temple at Trichur, the Koodalmanikya temple at Irinjalakkuda, the Shiva temple at Perumanam (in ruins), the temples at Guruvayur, Kottappadi, Tiruvegappura, Tirumoozhikkulam, Trippunit-

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tura, Ettumanoor, Kitangur, Arpukkara, Harippad, Neeleswaram, Talipparamba and Panniyur (in ruins). Inscriptional evidence is available for the existence in former times of theatres at Avittathoor and Tiruvanchikkulam. Where the temples did not have a Koothampalam, the Kootiyattam was allowed to be performed in *agrashala* halls. At the Triprayar Rama temple where there is no Koothampalam, the *Angulivanka* scene from Shaktibhadra's *Ascharyachudamani* is staged in the *mukhamandapa* right in front of the main shrine.

The Koothampalam is located in front of the shrine on its right side. It belongs to the class of *Prasada* structure. Though the sizes differ, all the structures follow a similar pattern. The roof is an enormous, four-sided structure, rectangular in shape, and slopes downwards in a steep manner; it is supported on beams resting on rows of pillars. The outer roof is either copper-plated or tiled with decorative flat tiles. At the top there are three finials or *tazhikakkudams*.

Inside the large auditorium is the raised stage; it is usually square shaped. It has a roof of its own, supported by round pillars. The outer edge of the stage which faces the God of the temple is built in alignment with the middle finial; thus the stage projects into the auditorium. In front of the stage is the special portion reserved for the Brahmins. The roof covering the stage is an independent structure, not part of the roof of the auditorium, and helps in the effective projection of the sound from the stage. At the back of the stage is the green-room, connected to it by two doors. Between these two doors are placed two *mizhavus* or big drums, with raised seats for the drummers.

The stage is very simple. There are one or two stools meant as seats and used for other stage business. A curtain is brought in by two persons at the time of the first entry of the main characters. During a performance the stage is decorated with palm and plantain leaves, red cloth and a cylindrical vessel (*para*) filled with rice. A huge lamp, about four

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feet high, made of bell metal is placed in front of the stage; it is lighted with oil and wicks, two wicks facing the actor and one facing the audience.

Stage manuals

In addition to the continuous tradition of the method of staging handed down from generation to generation, there are actual stage manuals giving choreographic details and elaborate instructions regarding the staging of plays. These stage manuals are the *Kramadipika* and *Attaprakaram*. The former is written in Sanskrit or Malayalam and explains the procedure to be adopted for the staging of plays. It deals with the songs, dance-steps, ragas and various stage directions. The latter indicates acting methods, the meaning of passages in the text and is in the form of a continuous, moving story, enabling the actor to expound the text accurately. Besides, there is the text in Malayalam which is to be spoken by the Vidushaka; it explains the meanings of the Sanskrit passages spoken by the hero, and contains the matter which is added to produce humour. Some of the commentaries on Sanskrit dramas also contain much useful material for the actors. The story of the scenes which are to be enacted, is summarised in archaic, Malayalam sentences; this part is recited by the Nambyar at the beginning of the performance and is called *Nambyarute Tamil;* it is available for some of the select scenes, usually staged. There is a Sanskrit text called *Hastalakshana dipika*, giving the rules of hand poses; it is mainly based on Bharata's *Natyashastra*. It was prepared for the use of the Chakyars, and is used even today in the training of Kathakali actors. Another interesting work shedding light on the Kerala Sanskrit stage is a Sanskrit work called *Natankusa*. This work severely criticises the Kootiyattam for taking liberties with the text and for adding unnecessary and extraneous matter.

Actors

It is said that formerly there were eighteen Chakyar

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families; but now there are only about half a dozen families which preserve the tradition : (1) The Ammannoor Chakyar family at Irinjalakkuda, (2) The Koypa Chakyar family at Painkulam and also at Tirumoozhikkulam, (3) The Maniyoor Chakyar at Killikkurissimangalam in Lakkiddi, originally part of Talipparamba in North Kerala, (4) Kuttancheri Chakyar at Nalluvay, (5) Potiyil Chakyar and (6) Kitangoor Chakyar. The late Cacchu Chakyar belonged to the Irinjalakkuda family; Padmashri Natyacharya Mani Madhava Chakyar belongs to the Maniyur family and Painkulam Rama Chakyar, now teaching at the Kerala Kala Mandalam, belongs to the Koypa family. Many of the Nambyar families are related to the Chakyar families through hypergamous matrimonial relationships.

Instrumental Music

The instruments used for the Kootiyattam include : (1) The *mizhavu*. The two drums called *mizhavu* are of slightly varying sizes; they are two to three feet high, and are made of copper. The mouth is tightly covered with calf skin. Members of the Nambiyar community sit facing the audience on seats arranged near the top of the drum stand. They play on them with their hands : one of them keeps the *tala*, while the other plays the *vinyasas*, using both the palms and the fingers. For Koothu just one *mizhavu* is sufficient. (2) The *Kuzhithalam* or a pair of bronze cymbals is used for keeping the *tala;* it is used by the Nangyar who also chants the verses for the introductory *Nirvahana*, the *dhruva* songs recited at the time of the entrance and exit of characters. (3) The *Kuzhal* or *Kurumkuzhal*, a double reed pipe, is employed to suggest the rhythm or play the *jatis*, and indicate the proper tunes or produce a melodious refrain in the background. (4) The *Idakka* or 'a tunable, double faced, pressure drum' is held by means of a piece of cloth hanging from the left shoulder of the standing drummer; the tension strings are manipulated by the left hand and the drumming is continued with a thin stick held in the right hand. This delicate and

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sensitive drum is also played in temples, and for the *Panchavadya* type of instrumental orchestra. (5) The auspicious *Shankha* or conch shell is blown when important personalities appear for the first time on the stage.

Abhinaya

The *abhinaya* for Kootiyattam is highly conventionalised and to a great extent follows the precepts of the *Natyashastra*. The *Purappadu* and the preliminary rites such as the dance sequences shed considerable light on the way the Prologue was performed in ancient Sanskrit dramas. The songs which invoke the deities, Ganapati, Saraswati and Shiva are known as *akkitta*. Then the Nambyar fetches sacred water from the green-room and sprinkles it on the stage, reciting the *mangalashloka*. These preliminary rites last for one day. The introduction of the earlier life of the hero (prior to the incidents to be actually staged) is called *Nirvahana;* it is very elaborate in its scope and continues for a few days. These earlier portions are expanded or reduced to suit the actual circumstances. The actual Kootiyattam or combined action takes place on the last three nights.

There are four types of *abhinaya* :

(i) *Angika* is the technique of using hand poses and gestures and stage movement to represent ideas. It is mainly based on the teachings of the *Natyashastra*. For example, in the first act of *Subhadradhananjaya*, Arjuna saves the heroine without knowing who she is. Her beauty casts its spell on him. He says :

नवकुवलयधाम्नोरञ्जनस्निग्धमक्ष्णोः
भयचलधृति युग्मं केयमालोलयन्ती ।
मुखपरिमललोभाद् भृङ्गदत्तानुयात्रा
शिथिलयति सुभद्रामुद्रितं मानसं मे ।।

The actor who plays Arjuna needs four hours to explain this verse through gestures. He gazes at Subhadra, describes her,

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beginning with the hair. He stops when he comes to the eyes, and recites this verse very slowly in the *raga* called *Arttan* indicating the meaning of each word through hand gesture. Then the gestures are repeated, but the verse is not recited. Not only the number and gender of words, but even the nature of the compounds is suggested through hand gestures. Then the verse is taken up the third time. This time it is the syntax, the *anvaya* which matters. He says the words, *iyarn ka*, "What sort of a girl is she? What is her name? Who is her father?" His gestures indicate these queries. Then he stops. "Why should this bother me?" Then he goes on to the words *me manasam shithilayati* and again expounds it in detail till he comes to *Subhadramuditram*, when he assumes the posture of Subhadra and suggests how she enters his heart. Her eyes are beautified by collyrium, *anjanasnigdham*. To explain the idea, he enacts a story. The heroine calls her attendants to adorn her body. The entire procedure is described, from the combing of her hair to the tying of the anklets round her feet. But something has been forgotten—applying the collyrium to the eyes. The Chakyar becomes the heroine, her attendants and even Arjuna himself.

The *Angikabhinaya* consists not only in explaining the meanings of the text, but also in indicating the nature of the character whose role is played by the actor. Thus in *Abhishekanataka* as soon as Sugriva enters, he holds the tree-branches, shakes them, scratches his head, smells the tip of his tail to show that he is a monkey. After he has done this he assumes the posture of Sugriva, king of the monkeys. In Kootiyattam the actor has to confine himself to the space between his shoulders during the hand gestures. This is unlike what happens in Kathakali where the actor can stretch his arms to any length.

(ii) *Vachika* or *verbal* recitation. Here the actor himself slowly recites his text, and then uses the language of gesture in detail.

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There is no regular music in Kootiyattam but there are different modes of reciting the verses or even the prose passages; the modes depend on various factors, such as the type of the character who is reciting them, the nature of the situation described and the sentiments conveyed. These modes of recitation have different technical names such as *Indala*, *Tarkan*, *Veladhooli*. These are called *ragas*, even if these *ragas* have very little to do with the *ragas* of Indian music. Some of these like *Srikamaram*, *Poranir* and *Tarkan* are found in the *Panns* of ancient Tamil music; some like *Indalam*, *Srikanthi* are again preserved in modern Kathakali songs. It is very difficult to identify and distinguish these Kootiyattam *ragas;* the modes of recitation have been handed down from teacher to student, without any precise theoretical definitions. However, there are detailed instructions as to the usage of these recitation *ragas ; Antari* is used for narration; *Veladhooli* is for shouting and indicates fear and perplexity; *Srikamara* suggests unexpected joy; *Tarkan* indicates anger; the use of *Veera Tarkan* denotes enthusiasm; *Kaisika* is for *hasya* and *bibhatsa*; *Poranir* is used in describing the rainy season, *Korakurinji* is used for the words of monkeys. *Indala* is the normal *raga* for the Vidushaka. Some correlations between *ragas* and *talas* are formulated in the stage manuals. In *Vachikabhinaya* the Vidushaka sometimes explains the significance of even the pure sounds of words uttered. In *Subhadradhananjaya*, the Vidushaka hears the word *Sakhe Kaudinya*. First he hears the sound *eee;* he says it is like the waves in the pond. Then *khe* which he thinks is like the croaking of frogs in a pond. He is reminded of his boyhood prank of wounding frogs and finally it strikes him that it is his friend Arjuna calling out to him. The hero gives prominence to those scenes where there is scope for *Angikabhinaya*; the Vidushaka to those where there is scope for *Vachikabhinaya*. He speaks his own lines and also those of the hero and explains them.

(iii) *Aharya* denotes costume and make-up. This is similar to that of Kathakali, but simpler. The *Chutti* (the lining

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made with rice flour paste) which is applied round the cheek and the chin is narrower, and the headgear is also smaller. Different types of make-up like *Pacca, Pazhukkua, Kari* and *Katti* are used. The magnanimous have the *Pazhukkua* make-up, with the face painted in a reddish colour. The haughty types like Ravana have the *Katti* make-up, with a round ball painted at the tip of the nose.

Formerly certain spectacular stage effects were achieved. In the Fourth Act of the *Nagananda,* thousands of strings were tied to the artificial wings of the actor playing Garuda and he used to slide down from above the stage space. The strings were manipulated by the Nambyar In *Tapatisamvarna,* the river were depicted by thousands of strings kept tightly in a horizontal way and the idea of *ozhukal* (flowing) was suggested. The suicide scene in *Nagananda* with Malayavati trying to hang herself, or the sequence in *Ascharyachudamani* where Lakshman deforms Surpanakha were staged with an eye for realistic detail.

(iv) *Sattvika* is the representation of moods and the emotions. With the help of delicate movements of the eyes, brows, lips and cheeks, but without any gestures of the hand, the actor is able to produce facial expressions which correspond to a particular mood. In this *Sattvikabhinaya* the Chakyar is supreme and has not been surpassed or even equalled by the Kathakali actors.

Since music and recitation are integral to the Kootiyattam, *talas* or rhythmic patterns play a very important part in the performance. The female musician, Nangyar, keeps the *tala* with the help of the *Kuzhitalam* cymbals. The drummers, seated at the back of the stage, behind the actor, and facing the *mizhavu* keep the *tala;* one of them merely keeps the *tala* and the other plays the appropriate *jatis* or *vinyasas* for the various *talas* to give proper effect to the acting. Six different *talas* are generally used, depending on the *raga* (mode of recitation) employed. There are

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detailed rules prescribing particular *talas* for particular *ragas* and specific occasions.

1. *Ektala* of four beats (*matras*) is used for the *ragas Srikanthi, Thondu, Poranir, Kaisika, Indala, Bhinna, Panchama* and *Dukkha Gandhara*. It is used also for *hasya* and *bibhasta rasas* and for the *adbhuta rasa* of *dhirodattha* characters.

2. *Dhruvatala* of fourteen beats is used for the *ragas Muddan, Tarkan* and *Korakurinji*, and in *adbhuta, bhayanaka, sambhoga shringara* (of *rakshasas*) and *vipralambha shringara* of *dhirodattha* characters.

3. *Triputatala* of seven beats, used when *Veladhooli* is the *raga* and for *bhayanaka rasa*. *Triputa* of slow tempo is used in *Ghattantari raga;* it is in a fast tempo in the case of *Srikamara* and *Paurali ragas*.

4. *Champatatala* of eight beats is used for the instrumental orchestra before the start of the play.

5. *Thampatala* of ten beats is the same as *Jhampa* of Karnatic music.

6. *Atanta* of fourteen beats is used while repeating what another has said. For different types of dance pieces or modes of gait different *talas* have been prescribed.

Till very recently the Kootiyattam, being a religious art, was strictly confined to the precincts of the temples of Kerala. It was only in 1960 that the first public performance of the Kootiyattam outside the temple precincts was staged at Calicut before a select audience invited by All India Radio. A portion from Act One of the *Subhadradhananjaya* was staged by Painkulam Rama Chakyar and his party. I made a preliminary survey of Kootiyattam in 1960; this survey was published in the *Samskrita Ranga Annual*, II. Other public performances of the Kootiyattam followed—at the

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Kalamandalam in 1962 arranged by Dr. Clifford Jones of the University of Pennsylvania; a show was arranged in Madras under the auspices of the Samskrita Ranga in 1963, and in New Delhi under the auspices of the Sangeet Nataka Akademi and the Pederewski Foundation. It was Natyacharya Mani Madhava Chakyar and his party who gave the performances at Madras and at New Delhi. Enthusiastic encouragement was given to this activity by scholars like Dr. V. Raghavan. My paper on Kootiyattam was republished as a booklet by the Sangeet Nataka Akademi. The Madras University produced a M. Litt thesis on Kootiyattam and another doctoral thesis was written in Poona. In 1966 a seminar on Kootiyattam was arranged at Cheruthurutty; it was sponsored jointly by the Kerala Kalamandalam and the American Institute of Indian Studies, on the enthusiastic initiative of Dr. Clifford Jones, the well-known Western scholar of art and theatre history. Mani Madhava Chakyar has prepared a scholarly work in Malayalam on the theory and practice of the Kootiyattam, and it is to be published by the Kerala Kalamandalam, where a department of Kootiyattam was started in 1967, with Painkulam Rama Chakyar as professor. Dr. Clifford Jones is now in India preparing a documentary film and a descriptive monograph on the technique and practice of this one surviving form of the classical Sanskrit-based dramatic tradition. The Kerala Kalamandalam and other scholars in the field are co-operating with him in this effort and it is to be hoped that more light will be shed on our ancient drama as a result of this awakening of interest in the subject.

Footnote to Chapter XI.

1. *Kootiyattam is also spelt as Kutiyattam or Kudiyattam.*

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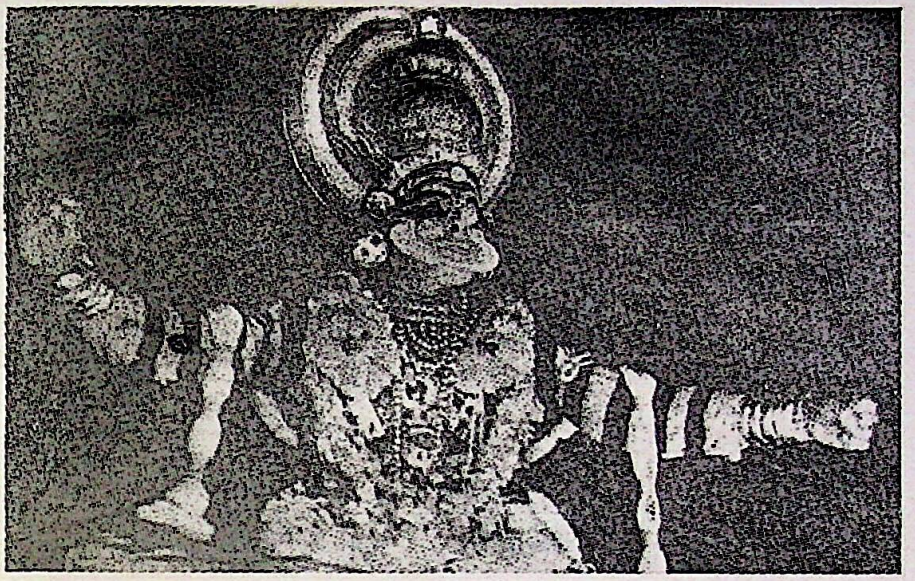

Painkuiam Rama Chakyar as Ravana performing the lifting of the Kailasa Mountain in Abhishekanatakam

Sthapana Sutradhara performing the Nityakriya. Two Mizhavu drums and the players

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Mani Madhva Chakyar in Asokavanikanka in Ascharachudamani

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The Yakshagana of Karnataka

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Kamalabhupa and his daughter Rati

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CHAPTER XII

THE YAKSHAGANA OF KARNATAKA

—K. Shivram Karanth

The Kannada-speaking area of India, usually called Karnataka, has a rich theatre form known as 'Yakshagana.' In earlier times it used to be called 'Bhagavatara ata,' 'Dashavatara ata,' or simply 'Bayalata.' In Kannada 'ata' means a play. Originally this form of theatre used to deal with the tales of Bhagavan Krishna and hence the name 'Bhagavatara ata.' Later on, it began to depict tales of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu; hence the name 'Dashavatara ata.' Being an open-air theatre, it came to be called 'Bayalata.' The nomenclature 'Yakshagana' came from a special style of music which accompanies these plays. It is a very ancient style, for there is mention of this style in Kannada literature of the tenth and twelfth centuries. The *Chandraprabha Purana* (1189) makes mention of the form. Nagachandra's *Mallinatha Purana* (1105) refers to Yakshagana as "pleasing to Laksmi who stands in the lotus." In the sixteenth century Kavi Ratnakar Varni speaks of *Yakkalagana* in his *Bharateshavaibhava.* Since he belongs to the region of South Kanara, it may be surmised that the Yakshagana form was widespread by that time.

Yakshagana embraced in earlier times a form of music played before royal personages. Later on, owing to the

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advent of more evolved styles of music like Hindustani and Karnatic music, Yakshagana receded very much into the background. We would have totally lost this form, but for the fact that opera-like plays began to be written in this style and their stage success contributed to its survival right to this day. In the Kannada country we have over three hundred Yakshagana plays, written by a number of writers, from at least the period of the sixteenth century. The tradition of staging such plays has continued over the past few centuries, evolving its own peculiar stage techniques.

An essential feature of these plays is that the play is conceived as a fantasy dealing with heroes, gods and demons; the material chosen for depiction comes from our myths and legends. Such stories are moralistic in outlook and often portray the victory of good over evil. Most of our traditional drama leans heavily on such legendary lore. The special distinction of Yakshagana consists in its presentation of the story through the medium of music, dance and literature.

The very backbone of Yakshagana is its operatic nature; songs and verses are employed for the narration of its themes. This is done sometimes in the third person, and often in the first and second persons. The songs consist of many musical patterns, composed to express every type of emotion contained in the puranic stories. The language is simple and direct, and can easily be understood by lay audiences. The *Bhagavathar*, or conductor of the play, has to sing all those songs (in addition to many narrative verses) to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums.

The *purva ranga* of the performance is known as *Sabhalakshana*. It begins with a prayer to Ganesha, Skanda and other deities. The *Bhagavathar* is, of course, the leader. Next to him in importance is the character who plays heroic or serious roles. Those who perform the parts of demons are known as *bannada vesha*. (Colour is *banna* (*varna*) in Kannada). The *stree-vesha* is lower down in the scale. The

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Bhagavathar is at the apex. The two accompanying instruments, the *chande* and the *maddale*, are an aid, but it is he who controls the rhythm and the pace. The *Bhagavathar* introduces each character; when a character is alone on the stage and seeks to express his feelings, it is the *Bhagavathar* who listens to his problems. The *shruti* determines the note of the *Bhagavathar* and the *shruti* box is by his side throughout the performance. Even when the music is silent, the dialogue continues to be based on this particular note and has its own mode of presentation. The din of the *chande* becomes more pronounced during a war sequence or in moments of elation or vigorous movement.

Another feature of the earlier part of the performance is the Balagopala (Krishna-Balarama) dance. Then there is always a comic interlude. Hanumanayaka comes with his band of urchins. These young monkeys are the *kodangi* and their *nayaka* (leader) is Hanuman. Even as the *Bhagavathar* sings the praises of Ganesha, Hanumanayaka and his followers forge ahead with their own brand of humour. They repeat the pattern during the moments when Skanda and Shiva-Parvati are praised. Then the *stree-vesha* enter; they dance and sing, concentrating on the *shringara rasa*.

The *Sabha-lakshana* terminates and the *Prasanga* proper begins. It is introduced by the *vaddolaga*. The character, who is about to enter, stands behind a curtain and he is presented to the spectators. If a Mahabharata story is to be enacted, the Pandavas are presented through the *vaddolaga*. For example, Hanumanayaka speaks the *birudavali* of Dharmaraja. He hails him thus: *Shrikrishnasuprita, Duritavamshavidhata, Trailokyavikhyata, Sakalavaninatha, Sharanasankuladhata, Kamakrodhavidhata, Ajatashatruavadata, Sarvashastradhita Saddharma Pariputa, Shrimadrajakulakulalimandita, Padpadmaradantha, Dharmaraja Maharaja.* There are traditional songs associated with a *vaddolaga*. For instance, Krishna's *vaddolaga* begins with a Sanskrit *shloka* and is followed by a song in *raga* Sankarabharana, *tala* Adi.

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The *vaddolaga* of the demons is a more spectacular affair; the dance is more slow and is punctuated by roars and cries. Popular *prasangas* like the Karna-Arjuna Yuddha are eagerly awaited by the audience.

Kannada works based on Sanskrit compositions form the source of these *prasangas*. These include Kumar Vyasa's *Bharata*, Torwe Narhari's *Ramayana* and Battaleshwara's *Kaushik Ramayana* and *Bhagvata Katha*. It is through them that village audiences make their earliest acquaintance with our epic forms. The neroic *prasangas* which feature battles have the word *kalga* incorporated into their titles. They include *Babhruvahana Kalga*, *Sudhanvana Kalga*, *Marimukha Kalga* and other *kalgas*. Those that end in marital bliss have the word *Kalyana* or *Parinaya* inserted in the title. For example, *Subhadra Parinaya* or *Kanakangi Parinaya*. Of course, the humorous element of a performance is wholly monopolised by Hanumanayaka. The *Sabha-lakhana* introduces us to the choreography of the Balagopala and *streevesha* sequences. The *vaddolaga* includes excellent group formations in its dance.

Various metres fulfil a particular function. For instance, the Kannada metre *Kanda*, based on the Sanskrit *Arya*, helps to speed up the pace of a narrative. *Vritta* is used when deities are praised. *Dvipadi* and *Bhamini Shatpadi* are employed for telling a story. Yakshagana is never too ornate and some of the songs like those in the *Shrikrishna Balalila* borrow heavily from folk songs. The famous *prasanga* of Chandravali composed by Kavi Nagappaya of Dhwajapura has elements of love and pathos, and a touching simplicity of mood. The *Bhagavathar* resorts to prose particularly when something exciting is expected to happen.

Yakshagana music at one time employed as many as one hundred and fifty *ragas* and about seven *talas* in its musical patterns (*Dhatis*). Today's *Bhagavathars* has forgotten most of these *ragas*; even so the musical patterns that have survived are numerous enough to depict forcefully the

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many different moods of these plays. If all the earlier *ragas* could be revived now, we would experience again the operatic excellence of this form. There is a richness and potency in the *ragas* and *talas* used; they are able to convey various shades of thought and feeling. In classical music, both Hindustani and Karnatic, we have numerous *ragas*, but their thought content is generally devotional or sad in its nature. It embraces the wail of a devotee, self-castigation or praise of one's personal deity. Even in the aspect of love, it is the *viraha* element (the pangs of separation and the yearning for the presence of the lover who has vanished from sight) that predominates. A drama cannot restrict itself to these emotions alone. It has to deal with other human feelings like anger, jealousy, rage or joy. It cannot limit its emotional core to pathos, devotion or praise. The Yakshagana composer, therefore, found greater opportunities for composing expressive patterns which could also lend themselves to rhythmical dance expression.

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In Yakshagana some of the *ragas* have Karnatic names (Gaula, for instance). Others have a wholly Kannada flavour—Koravi, Mechali or Gopanite. The Koravi is close to the Kurunji of Karnatic music. Dvijavanti is like the Hindustani Jaijaiwanti; Pahadi is like Pahadi. Assembling some of our traditional *Bhagavathars* and with the help of classical scholars (in both the Karnatic and Hindustani styles), I was able to discover more than sixty *ragas*, whose patterns our *Bhagavathars* can recollect still, but whose names they have forgotten. Not being sure of their scales, they often migrate from *raga* to *raga*; at times they tend to be monotonous. We realized that whenever an old composition (set in a particular *raga*) was wittingly or unwittingly changed, its expressive power seemed to wane. It is quite clear that in former times composers were experts in their musical style; whereas most of our present day *Bhagavathars* appear to have lost their moorings.

The importing of *gamaka* (style of modulation) from the

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Hindustani and Karnatic schools has also had an adverse effect on Yakshagana. This factor differentiated it from the other two schools. The tendency of the *Bhagavathar* to imitate Marathi stage music and the devotional songs of saints like Purandaradasa has also modified the original style and impaired its purity.

There is one element in Yakshagana which has suffered a good deal at the hands of the present-day *Bhagavathar* and his accompanists. The *Bhagavathar* tends to ignore the language-content of his song, and to concentrate for the main part on its style and *tala*. The accompanists are mainly absorbed in playing the *maddale* and *chande*. The sound of these drums drowns all the words of the song. The musicians pay little attention to thought content. The pitch of the voice and the accompanying cymbal and drum beats are shrill and piercing. The dancer necessarily follows them. Subtler feelings, the lines of demarcation between one emotion and another are wiped out in the process. Earnest attention to these aspects of music can help us to exploit the richness of Yakshagana. For a dancer it offers wonderful opportunities for expression; many of the songs portray a wide range of emotions, calling for quick changes in mood and utmost subtlety in projection.

The characters speak out their words in dignified prose after each song; this art has to be cultivated over long years of experience. The prose passages cannot be learnt by rote. A speech is delivered extempore and often improvised on the spur of the moment after the *Bhagavathar* has sung one stanza after the other during the course of the play. Two opposing characters, or a courting couple, can thus develop a fascinating dialogue between themselves; this is often handled with dexterity by veterans of the Yakshagana stage.

Kathakali, with its strong accent on music and the language of gesture, allows for no dialogue spoken by actors. In Yakshagana the dance element is not predominant. The story unfolds itself through the words spoken by the actors.

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The dance is supported by the rhythm of the *chande* and *maddale* and the pace of the *Bhagavathar*. The simple metre of the *Bhamini Shatpadi* provides the dancer with the right tempo. The *stree-vesha* concentrate on the *lasya* element of the dance. The male characters display valour and fury. Hanumanayaka's movements embrace humour and joy. The dances do not depict so much of delicate emotions as the predominant mood of a sequence. They offer the rhythmic background to its delineation. Thus dance (except for the few occasions when travel, battle and valour are depicted) serves as no more than an embellishment to an otherwise prose drama. The spoken word is the main ingredient and the audiences remain passive observers of the drama enacted in front of them.

The important problem in Yakshagana is that of liberating dance from the medium of prose. Dance with music can by itself suggest quite significantly many aspects of a drama. The thought-content is in the realm of language; but emotions can also find an intense and subtle expression through music and dance. To discover these possibilities, I esehewed spoken prose altogether in my ballets. The songs did have words; they set a sequence in motion. But the dancers were taught to express their emotions in terms of footwork, body flexions, gesture, facial expressions, and choreography. This did not mean substitution of gestures for every spoken word. The minimum of commonly understood gestures was used. The entire body was turned into a vehicle of expression. Footwork was subdued or tuned up depending on the nature and pitch of the emotion. Steps were not deemed to be exercises in technical skill. *Tala* rhythms had to be a part of the dancer's body-movements and poses. The rhythms of songs had to evoke corresponding reflections in a dancer's movements. Years of study and exercise led me to the conclusion that our Indian dance has a lot to gain by accepting the fact that one medium hardly enriches itself by imitating another. Skill alone is

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neither art nor *shastra*; acrobatics in *raga* and *tala* cannot serve the needs of dance or musical expression.

The potential in this form can be exploited to the full and its canvas enlarged. For example, tradition has given Hanumanayaka full liberty of speech and action. He assumes light roles like those of servant, courier or messenger. He provides the element of humour in the dance. Dance developed to suit such a mood can enrich the possibilities latent in his role. Yakshagana has a few basic dance patterns but they are restricted to the performances of the main characters during the battle and travel sequences. They can be employed to embrace other situations, too.

Yakshagana surpasses many Indian theatre forms in one particular field, that is in the matter of costumes and make-up. These plays were originally conceived as fantasies and practioners of the form evolved a rich variety of costumes. Their design was not inspired by ancient paintings or sculpture; it is based on the essential nature of the characters. To the first category belong heroes like Karna and Arjuna or *Avatara purusha* like Rama or Krishna. The sesecond type consists of characters of heroic mould who are a trifle too proud of their prowess and consequently slightly immature. To this class belongs Indra or Gaya (Gandharva). The third group includes those like Kirata who are fearless, yet somewhat uncultured and even stupid. Then there are demons like Ravana and Kumbhakarna who are brave in their own right but, on the whole, quite destructive in their ways. Another group includes those who are born among demons but have a code of right and wrong. Among these are Ravana's brother Vibhishana or Ravana's son Atikaya. A special kind of costume is designed for them. Then there are those deities like Veerabhadra and Narasimha who are entrusted with the difficult task of annihilating demons. Apart from the characters of this *deva-danava-manava* group, there are others like Hanuman, Bali and Jambava. Then there are straight characters, like rishis or

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gurus. The *stree-vesha* includes queens; princesses and attendants.

The Yakshagana performances used to take place at night. Torches were used to light the arena. The dim, yellowish flames flickered and the dazzling costumes imparted to the atmosphere a suggestion of fantasy. In the olden days *aradala* (yellow orpiment) was mixed with coconut oil and smeared over uncovered parts of the body. With the introduction of petromax lamps—a whiter shade, with a slight crimson colouring, was substituted. The area of the temples near the eyes is covered with white and outlined with streaks of red. A white *tilak* is painted on the forehead and a black line is drawn in the middle. The *stree-vesha* has a red *tilak* on the forehead. Balagopala, Lava-Kusha, Krishna have no moustaches.

The main colour for the *rakshasa* characters is red, green and black. The face is multi-coloured. Rice paste is used to outline the contours and after many such layers, the face begins to have a solid, three-dimensional effect. The face looks even larger when it is framed by a strip of paper, cut into sharp, teeth-like shapes and tied behind the ears.

Those playing the roles of rishis or purohits are usually simply clad. The clothing for all the characters is effective; the ornaments are elaborate and dazzling. Special types of headgear correspond to the nature of the characters portrayed in the play. Every foreign student of the theatre who has witnessed Yakshagana plays, has gone into raptures over its costume and make-up. It can stand comparison with the best in their Balinese, Javanese or Cambodian counter-parts. Unfortunately decadence slowly set in in the matter of costumes, particularly in the style of clothing worn by female characters. The desire to cater to popular taste resulted in their being presented like fashionable ladies of the times. Female figures looked like women on the

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street straying on to the stage from among the crowd. Re-designing appropriate costumes and ornaments for them has now become an urgent task and I have sought to introduce suitable patterns and colours for the sari and other apparel used by female characters. I have also tried to design a few ornaments to blend with those of the male characters. A number of early plays have stopped being performed and the costumes and make-up of characters like Vali, Hanuman Jambava, Nandi and Garuda have been totally or partially forgotten. I am now making an attempt, with the help of veteran artists, to fill in this gap and introduce improvements in this sphere.

There is an enthusiasm for the 'new' and the 'latest' and many troupes have made it a point to stage novel and fenciful plays. But the writers seem to lack talent and shabby musical structures are produced as a result. They do not realize that new types of characters need intricate and well-designed costumes and make-up. Imitating the professional stage of the cinema will not help matters.

To get a clear picture of what Yakshagana is, all one has to do is to experience its artistic wealth. This rich variety cannot be expected of every troupe. Every play cannot fulfil a rigorous standard. Today the aesthetic elements of this theatre have been renounced by those votaries of the bizarre who have no sense of colour or harmony. Even so, there are a few temple troupes which still retain much of what is best in the old tradition.

The village audiences, who for centuries appreciated and patronised the traditional Yakshagana, now find it stale; their patronage has shifted to those cheap and garrulous productions that profess to be Yakshagana. Lack of aesthetic perception has contributed to this state of affairs. In earlier days, traditions were considered sacred and nobody dared to tamper with a given form. A more sensible government or the existence of discerning patrons could have

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helped in the task of preserving Yakshagana as a national asset. State troupes could have come into existence and this heritage (which is now in the hands of commercially-minded individuals and novelty-chasing audiences, who regard it as a form of escape) would have thus been conserved in its authentic state,

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APPENDIX

SRI AUROBINDO'S VIEWS ON THE CREATION AND ENJOYMENT OF ART

—Dr. Nalini Devdas

This paper is a study of three aspects of Sri Aurobindo's views on art : firstly, the place of art in his theory of the spiral of psychological and social development; secondly, the relationship between art and spirituality; and, thirdly, the nature and orientation of Indian art.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of the spiral-like process of human evolution is elucidated in *The Human Cycle*. This work first appeared as a serial under the title of *The Psychology of Social Development* from September 1915 to August 1916 in the *Arya*, the journal that he published from Pondicherry.[1] His views on the art and culture of India are found in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* which includes three sets of articles : *Is India Civilised ? A Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture* and *A Defence of Indian Culture*. These first appeared in the *Arya* from December 1918 to January 1921.[2] Sri Aurobindo addresses these articles to Indians whose attitudes were moulded by ideas current in the West at that time. The type of Western rationalist criticism against which Sri Aurobindo defends Indian culture has been counter-balanced

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by other serious and sympathetic studies on various aspects of Indian Civilization. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo's views on the "first principles" underlying Indian culture deserve our consideration.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of art, his views on the significance of art for establishing the proper course in human evolution, and his ideas on the future of the arts are found in *The Future of Poetry*. This work first appeared as a series of essays in the *Arya* from 1917 to 1920.[3]

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo presents his grand vision of the universe gradually evolving through the stages of matter and life to the present transitional stage of mind and, finally, leaping forward to the goal of "superconsciousness." Rejecting Samkara's mayavada, he interprets every details of the complex evolutionary process as a real manifestation of the Absolute. The concept of "supermind" is introduced to provide a principle that links the Absolute and the world. It is conceived as the divine principle that descends into the universe, remains "inconscient" in matter and guides the evolutionary process towards the glorious "supramental transformation" of all things. Following the Taittiriya Upanisad, Sri Aurbindo says that this whole universe is an "out-thrilling" of supreme delight (*ananda*). He defines aesthetic delight as the human response to the divine delight dwelling in all things in the form of beauty.

> To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.[4]

I Sri Aurobindo's View of the Place of Art in the Spiral of Human Evolution

According to Sri Aurobindo, the psychological stages in the human evolution are : the symbolic, typal, conventional, individualist and subjective. The first three stages are placed within the "infra-rational curve" whereas the two that follow them are in the "curve of reason."

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Sri Aurobindo places India's vedic age in the symbolic stage. Since human evolution is seen as spiral, the infra-rational curve can be interpreted as a "relapse and reversion"[5] rather than as an original or primitive state. This scheme provides for the presence of exceptional individuals in the symbolic stage, such as the philosophers of earliest Greece and the vedic *rsis*, who rise above the limitations of their contemporaries and guide them towards the highest ideals.[6]

Sri Aurobindo maintains that vedic poetry already expresses in the symbolic stage the ideal towards which artists and poets strive throughout the course of human evolution. According to him, the vedic hymn has its psychological roots in some momentous happening in the life of the *rsi* and, therefore, it conveys the response of the soul to the Absolute present but hidden in all things.[7] By expressing the soul's vision of the Absolute in inspired and powerfully rhythmic words, vedic poetry becomes the "mantra of the Real" and reveals the ideal towards which poetry must always strive.[8]

The next two stages, the typal and the conventional, are described by Sri Aurobindo as a period when all aspects of human life, including religion and art, become formalized. He stresses that when formal rules and set prescriptions dominate, art can no longer be true to its ideal of expressing beauty : "it constructs, but does not create."

Sri Aurobindo sets the next two stages of human evolution, individualistic and the subjective, within the curve of reason, since it is by asserting the freedom to think for themselves that individuals break free from the bonds of the conventional stage and gradually grow in self-knowledge. By examining trends in Europe beginning with the Reformation and the Renaissance, Sri Aurobindo points out that, in fact, when individual rights are asserted, the consequences of social chaos are feared so that the age of reason gives rise to two sharply opposed ideals : the individualistic and the collective.[9]

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In all his writings, Sri Aurobindo confronts us with the tragedy of human reason: it can never deal with the complex gestalts of life. Proceeding always by analysis and synthesis, reason is neither able to achieve genuine integration within the human personality nor can it find the proper balance between individual freedom and social harmony.[10] While recognizing the importance of the scientific attitude in saving religion and art from the bonds of traditions and set prescriptions, Sri Aurobindo maintains that the positivistic and pragmatic turn of science took the vitality out of every form of cultural and spiritual life. His estimate of the arts during science's "heyday of triumphant materialism" is hardly encouraging.[11]

For Sri Aurobindo, Nietzsche's philosophy of the will-to-live and Bergson's "exaltation of Intuition above intellect" are heralds of the subjective age that is ushered in by the inevitable revolt of our life-forces against the confining formulas of reason. According to him, the mark of subjectivism is to respect life as a concrete self-creating process and to seek for the true core of the personality, its deepest source of energy.[12]

Sri Aurobindo considers the subjective age to be a crucial importance in human evolution: the desire for self-knowledge could either impel us towards spiritual knowledge or trap us into a false subjectivism centred around the vital impulses of the ego.[13] He sees these tensions of subjectivism reflected in the cultural manifestations of our time and, therefore, he distinguishes two stages in modern art and literature: the "vitalistic" and the "psychic." He argues that the "psychological vitalism" of the first stage seeks to penetrate the most subtle impulses of human nature, but becomes so obsessed with "the malady of Life rather than its health and power" that "the centre and source of life's energies" remain undiscovered.[14] He characterizes the art of the second stage as "more truly psychological" and concerned with the "psychic" aspects of

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personality.[15] In his system the "psyche" is the divine spark in the human person and the secret guide in the evolutionary process. Accordingly, he calls this art "psychic", because he believes that it begins to penetrate to the true centre of the personality.

Sri Aurobindo's writings reflect his unwavering confidence that the subjective age, in spite of its agonies, is but a transitional period, and that the spiritual age is already upon us. In *The Future of Poetry*, he shows his conviction that when the new age dawns, literature and art will achieve their true purpose of expressing the divine delight which moves in all forms of life.

II The Nature of Art and its Relationship to Spirituality

Three aspects of Sri Aurobindo's theory of art are discussed here : his view of the psychological factors in the creation and enjoyment of art; his idea of the spiritual transformation of aesthetic awareness and art-creation; and, thirdly, his theory of the spiritual orientation of art.

1. Psychological Factors in the Creation and Enjoyment of Art

It is necessary to look at Sri Aurobindo's complex picture of the mind in order to appreciate his idea of the psychological processes underlying the creation and enjoyment of art. Three levels of the mind are distinguished by him : the "fundamental substratum" that deals with the physical and vital aspects of personality; the second level with ethical consciousness and aesthetic awareness as its two sides; and, above them all, the intellect with its complex cognitive and dynamic, rational and intuitive roles.[16] According to his theory of evolution, at this stage, the intuitive power of the intellect is so submerged under the rational that it is barely recognizable.

Sri Aurobindo stresses the power struggles that take

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place among the physical, vital, ethical and aesthetic aspects as each of them tries to mould the whole personality according to its aspirations. He argues that the unresolved struggle between ethical ideals and aesthetic aspirations has had its impact on the whole course of human evolution. Commitment to beauty manifests itself as impatience towards ethical rules that block freedom of expression; commitment to goodness leads to distrust of the aesthetic sense as something fundamentally undisciplined and non-moral.[17]

According to Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, the struggle remains unresolved in this transitional period, the mental stage, because of the inability of reason to guide each of the essential aspects of personality towards its own perfection. He argues that the tension between the ethical and the aesthetic sides of human nature must be maintained until all tensions are resolved through the spiritual transformation of the human personality.[18]

Sri Aurobindo's letters are chiefly concerned with poetic inspiration, but it is clear that what he says can be extended to other forms of art as well. He stresses that the inspiration for poetry can come from any level of the personality : the infra-rational levels of physical and vital forces, the creative intelligence, the higher levels of the mind, or the psyche within. The inspiration is then transmitted to the vital level, the centre of creative energies and emotional responses. The vital aspect of the personality "desires, enjoys, possesses actualities, but it hunts also after unrealized possibilities, is ardent to materialize them, to possess and enjoy them as well."[19] It follows that, if the link with the vital is weak, the art-form will not manifest energy.

In all his writings on art, Sri Aurobindo stresses that creative excellence is possible only when the intellect interferes as little as possible. He says :

> The intellect is not the poet, the artist, the creator within us; creation comes by a supra-mental influx

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> of light and power which must work always, if it is to do its best, by vision and inspiration.[21]

He describes creative intuition as "an edge or ray or outleap of a superior light" coming from the supermind and entering into some level of the human personality.[21]

Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo strongly maintains that the discriminating process by which the artist corrects, changes and improves his work is not an imposition of the intellect but an aspect of the original intuition If the "intuitive critical vision" is to work, vital emotions and critical intellect must not interfere; if it fails, the artist must wait for its return and, through its aid, bring himself back into "harmony with the momentum of his original inspiration."[22]

2. Spiritual Transformation of Aesthetic Awareness and Art Creation

In Sri Aurobindo's system of thought, spiritual transformation signifies the gradual cleansing, healing, integrating and perfecting of all aspects of the human personality through three modes of transformation : the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental. Through psychic transformation, the psyche gradually replaces reason as the true guide of the human personality. Higher, luminously intuitive levels of the mind are opened up when spiritual transformation is accomplished. Both the psyche and the higher levels of the mind have two powers that reason lacks : the power of integrating the personality without destroying the diversity of its aspects, and the power of intuitive knowledge.

In Sri Aurobindo's system, the psyche is the emanation of divine delight.[23] As such, it is the psyche in us that responds with delight to the beauty in nature and in art. Whereas the ego bifurcates all experiences into forms of pleasure and pain, the psyche takes the stance of a calm witness and intuitively responds to the divine presence everywhere. By opening up mental-blocks, purifying the

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emotions and suffusing the personality with devotion (*bhakti*), the psyche begins to heal the rift between commitment to goodness and longing for beauty. In one of his letters, Sri Aurobindo says that whereas the higher levels of the mind are characterized by "greatness, power, wideness", the poetic expressions of the psyche are "more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of perception, an intimate language."[24]

When poetic expression is inspired by the higher, intuitive levels of the mind, Sri Aurobindo calls it "overhead poetry." He tells us that constant practice in integral yoga can open up these higher levels of the mind. And, he emphasizes that when the intuitive light of the higher levels is no longer diffused and their dynamic force is not scattered, aesthetic awareness is transformed so that creative ability gathers power. According to him, overhead poetry displays "a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a breath of powerful audacity, strength and space."[25]

To conclude this discussion of Sri Aurobindo's views on the psychological factors in aesthetic experience, it is important to draw attention to the extreme complexity of his picture of human consciousness and its responses to beauty. Those who prefer to work with a simpler model would find such complexity not only baffling but also constricting. Many of Sri Aurobindo's letters are concerned with the question of exactly determining the level of consciousness from which specific lines of poetry are written. Since a correlation is made between the degree of spiritual development and the type of poetry that is written or enjoyed, his disciples raise this question over and over again.

3. The Nature of Art : Its Spiritual Orientation

In all his writings, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the spiritual significance of art. For him, all art-forms are symbols of the infinite and formless Absolute.[26] Therefore, in his view, art has a crucial function in life : "poetry and art are

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born mediators between the immaterial and the concrete, the spirit and life."

In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo directly raises the question : does art exist for its own sake or is it oriented towards a goal that transcends it? He answers :

> Art for Art's sake certainly; Art as a perfect form and discovery of Beauty; but also Art for the soul's sake and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty. In that self-expression there are grades and hierarchies, widenings and steps that lead to the summits. And not only to enlarge Art towards the widest wideness but to ascend with it to the heights that climb towards the highest is and must be part both of our aesthetic and our spiritual endeavour.[27]

Sri Aurobindo's concept of "grades and hierarchies" is significant because it helps us to understand his view of the relationships between art and spiritual experience. The Integral Vedanta of Sri Aurobindo is based on the affirmation that the Absolute is manifest everywhere. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo accepts the position that there are "degrees" in the divine manifestation because "in some forms of life there are less potentialities for the self-expression of the spirit than in others."[28]

Furthermore, with regard to human nature, Sri Aurobindo maintains that though divine power (*sakti*) is manifest in all aspects of the personality, there are degrees of empowerment. The higher levels of the mind are capable of receiving and expressing the divine *sakti* more fully than the lower mental, vital and physical aspects of the personality.[29] It follows that there is a correlation between the degree of divine power at any level of the personality and the degree and range of divine delight (*ananda*) to which it can respond.

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Sri Aurobindo tells us that even in the highest spiritual experience, when this whole universe is seen as a divine revelation, the awareness of degrees of manifestation is not lost. He says that even in the yogi's "universal vision of beauty", everything is not reduced to a single level.

The differentiation that he makes between the artist's aesthetic delight and the yogi's spiritual experience is based on the concept of degrees of divine manifestation. The artist's vision of beauty depends on the degree of receptivity of which his personality is capable; it is also related to concrete things and particular situations where divine ananda is manifested to a certain degree. The yogi's spiritual realization "can bring the vision and the rapture of the All-Beautiful everywhere." This is regarded as the culmination of all the activities of life.

It becomes apparent that, within the framework of the Integral Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo views art as the intense and energetic expression of the artist's vision of beauty through a significant form; in this sense, he considers art to be an end in itself. He also views art as the means by which the artist lifts himself and those who enjoy his work of art towards higher and more complete visions of divine delight; in this sense, art points to an end that transcends it.

When the artist's personality is cleansed and transformed, he also participates in the yogi's "universal vision of beauty." And, when the artist perceives divine delight pervading all things, there is no difference between his aesthetic awareness and his spiritual realization. In him, art and spirituality have become one.

In *The Future of Poetry* Sri Aurobindo gives us his vision of the coming spiritual age when art and spirituality will coincide. He says that the art of the future will express the rich harmony of five eternal powers : truth, beauty, delight, life and spirit.

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In order to evaluate Sri Aurobindo's theory of art, it is necessary to consider his view of the relationship between personal qualities and impersonal values in the artist's creative vision. According to him, the impersonal and timeless element in art is primary because art aims at expressing the perfection of beauty.[30] His system of Integral Vedanta recognizes the value of concrete entities and individual persons; yet, in *The Future of Poetry*, he appears to minimize the significance of the individual. He maintains that both the individual personality of the poet and the concrete form of the object must lose themselves in the vision of beauty.[31] But isn't the individual genius of the artist important in all creation of art? And isn't the artist's delight in an object or event related to his awareness of its uniqueness? Every aesthetic experience has its special features that must not be forgotten in the eagerness to view all things as manifestations of one Reality.

III. Sri Aurobindo's View of Indian Art

Sri Aurobindo points out that Indian culture provides for the full development of the human personality and, at the same time, gives a spiritual orientation to life through the concept of the four goals of man (purusarthas). His interpretation of dharma is of special significance. He says :

> This ideal was not a purely moral or ethical conception, although that element might predominate; it was also intellectual, religious, social, aesthetic, the flowering of the whole man, the perfection of the total human nature.[32]

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Indian art agrees with that of his contemporary, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Both of them maintain that the Indian artist's aim is not to imitate nature but to grasp, visualize and express the essential form of the object. Both of them agree that Indian theories of aesthetics require that the beholder must identify himself

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with the object of art through an act of intuition in order to enjoy aesthetic experience. Furthermore, according to both of them, Indian theories of aesthetics bring aesthetic experience under the orbit of spiritual experience.

Sri Aurobindo explains that the main concern of the Indian artist is "the truth of the thing he wishes to express." Artistic skill is measured by the ability to reveal the true nature (*svabhava*) of the object. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that if the *svabhava* could best be expressed by making "some modification, some pose, some touch or symbolic variation which is not found in physical nature", the artist is at liberty to do so. What is required of him is "truth to his vision, the unity of the thing he is seeing and expressing.[33] According to Sri Aurobindo the whole significance of the term *sadrsya* (correspondence) in Indian aesthetic theory is fidelity to the essential nature of the object as it is given to the artist in his intuitive vision of it.[34]

Both Sri Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy maintain that the Indian artist employed techniques akin to yogic meditation in order to visualize the *svabhava* of the object.[35] Unlike Coomaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo does not enter into details about these yogic techniques but explains that the artist expresses what his psyche sees. In the context of Sri Aurobindo's view of the human personality, this implies that the artist is being propelled, more and more insistently, towards the psychic transformation of his whole being.

When the beholder enjoys the work of art, like the artist, he also becomes aware of his psyche that perceives more truly than his senses or his mind can. In the act of creation, the artist identifies with the true form of the object, its *svabhava*, and experiences delight.[36] In the act of enjoying, the beholder identifies with the work of art, shares the vision of the artist, and experiences delight.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy agree that the Indian theories of aesthetics consider aesthetic delight to

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be akin to spiritual bliss. According to Coomaraswamy, the basic principle underlying Hindu theories of art is that "religion" and "art" are "names for one and the same experience—an intuition of reality and of identity."[37]

In order to grasp the sense of Coomaraswamy's statement, we must keep in mind that he is using the term "religion" in the widest possible sense. For him, religion signifies intuition of the Absolute and identification with it. This view implies that religion is the goal and culmination of *all* human activity. Coomaraswamy himself makes this clarification when he says that love, truth and beauty are "three phases of the Absolute" experienced by the lover, the philosopher and the artist.[38] Love, truth and beauty are distinct; religion comprehends them all and gives to each of them its orientation; it is only in this sense of being their summation and goal that religion is identical with each of them.

Sri Aurobindo also makes it clear in his interpretation of Indian aesthetic theories that aesthetic experience becomes identical with spiritual experience only when it realizes all its possibilities and attains its goal of realizing the Absolute as beauty. In his letters, he explains that whereas *rasa* or aesthetic delight is associated with particular delight, ananda or spiritual delight is the experience of the yogi who has realized oneness with all beings. Ananda is "more deep, intense, rapturous than any mental or vital or any physical *rasa* reaction can be."[39]

An Evaluation of Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of Indian Art

In a recently published work on the history of Western reactions to Indian art, entitled *Much Maligned Monsters*, the author, Partha Mitter gives us a very perceptive account of the work of Coomaraswamy. While recognizing the great value of Coomaraswamy's work, Mitter makes the following criticisms :

Firstly, he maintains that Coomaraswamy has not

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helped us to understand "in concrete and human terms" the nature and quality of Indian art. He argues that Coomaraswamy has resorted too much to metaphysical generalizations, whereas the urgent need is to understand Indian art by setting it within its specific social and cultural context.[40] Secondly, Mitter argues that Coomaraswamy and others who have characterized Indian art as "spiritual" have drained it of its vital substance. He says that they have not drawn attention to the fact that "the great strength of Indian art consists of its wonderful, life-affirming vitality."

The first criticism is too harsh when applied to Coomaraswamy, but it certainly applies to Sri Aurobindo. It is disappointing that Sri Aurobindo so seldom relates the "first principles" of Indian culture that he puts forward to particular and concrete social situations. Perhaps he expected his followers to take up this important task. Sri Aurobindo makes the general statement that those who created and those who enjoyed the great works of Indian art were deeply influenced by the idea of the four goals of man. This statement does not help us to understand the nature of Indian art unless it is related to the actual situations in which the various styles were created and to the actual thoughts, aspirations and way of life pursued by those who created and enjoyed the art.

It is difficult to see how the second criticism applies either to Coomaraswamy or to Sri Aurobindo. Both of them have amply shown that in their views "spiritual" and "life affirming" are not contradictory qualities. In fact, Coomaraswamy says that "degrees of vitality, unity, grace" are the only criteria by which sequences of style ought to be traced in Indian art.[41] Sri Aurobindo also emphasizes the robustness and vitality of Indian art. And, in his view, all expressions of vitality are, ultimately, manifestations of spirituality.

Sri Aurobindo has helped us to see that, in principle,

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Indian culture has given life a spiritual orientation by affirming spiritual knowledge as the ultimate goal of life. He has also made us aware that a spiritual view of life does not drain it of its vital energy. But there is still a lack : Sri Aurobindo has not fulfilled the urgent need of examining to what extent that spiritual orientation was actually expressed in concrete cultural manifestations in different periods of Indian history.

His view of history bears a certain affinity to that of Hegel. In this view, history is seen as a process of evolution by which the world-spirit expresses and realizes itself in time. By concentrating attention on the idea of evolution, this view tends to blur the significance of particular events. Concrete events of history are not investigated from various angles, but are interpreted in such a way that they fit into a scheme of gradual spiritual development.

The idea of a symbolic stage makes it possible for Sri Aurobindo to maintain that a high level of wisdom and culture was attained by the *rsis* at a very early period of India's history, even when most of humanity was in the infra-rational level. Though Sri Aurobindo's ideas on symbolism in the Veda have proved to be valuable, scholars are not agreed to what extent the wisdom expressed through this symbolism was absorbed into Indian culture. Sri Aurobindo has not taken into consideration the various ideas on the meaning of life that have been put forward in India and the impact of these ideas on each other.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's idea of a subjective age enables him to maintain that India has an important part in the present period of human development. According to his theory of human evolution, the mood of our time is a subjectivism thirsting for knowledge of the self. He argues that by preserving and renewing the spiritual orientation of her culture and art against all the attacks of materialism and rationalism, India can help other nations to take the right

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course. Again, this idea is too vague and general to help us in understanding what is actually happening in India and in the world at this time. If the idea that the spiritual culture of India can help humanity's progress has significance, its meaning has to be demonstrated in concrete terms with relation to specific events.

Footnotes to Appendix

(Note : The series entitled *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo, Ashram, 1971) is indicated by the abbreviation SABCL)

1. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo : A Biography and a History* (Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1972), p. 838.
2. Bibliographical note in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, vol. 14.
3. Bibliographical note in *The Future of Poetry*, SABCL, vol. 9.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, vol. 15, p. 135.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
7. Sri Aurobindo, *On the Veda* (Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1964), p. 11.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future of Poetry*, SABCL, vol. 9, p. 9.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, vol. 15, pp. 15-17.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-103.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

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15. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
17. *Ibid*, pp. 87-88.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
19. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (New York : Indian Library Society, 1965), p. 373.
20. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, vol. 15, p. 128.
21. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 842.
22. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, vol. 15, p. 132.
23. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 242.
24. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*, SABCL, vol. 9, p. 364.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, vol. 15, p. 215.
27. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*, SABCL, vol. 9, pp. 334, f.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 371-388.
30. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future of Poetry*, SABCL, vol. 9, p. 39.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
32. Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, vol. 14, p. 105.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 248, f.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Transformation of Nature in Art*, (New York : Dover Publications, 1965), pp. 5, f.

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36. Sri Aurobindo *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, vol. 14, p. 212.

37. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, (New York : The Noonday Press, 1967), p. 41.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

39. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*, SABCL, vol. 9, p. 492.

40. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 286.

41. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 117.

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THE EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

This collection of essays was put together to explore as well as to stimulate—to explore the less discussed area of the performing arts and their less understood secular origins and secular aspects and to stimulate further exploration and discussion by others. I am satisfied that we have gone some way along both these lines and in the succeeding paragraphs, I would like to suggest some areas for further exploration, which I consider important.

I have already referred to the vigorous middle class Hindu revivalism round the turn of the century.[1] It is quite likely that Coomaraswamy was influenced by it and in his turn, influenced it too. Vivekananda, Tilak, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo along with him were all its creatures as well as creators, each in his own way. Of these, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo along with Coomaraswamy concentrated on art and philosophy and evolved somewhat similar views on Indian art from different angles, Tagore as a creative artist, Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher and Coomaraswamy as an art-critic and art-historian. Each in his own way stressed the spiritual or religious nature of Indian art and culture, Coomaraswamy perhaps most explicitly and most comprehensively in the bulk of his later writings. Sri Aurobindo's views are discussed briefly and perceptively by Dr. Nalini Devdas—while Tagore's are too well known through his own writings and the interpretations of critics and admirers to need a separate exposition in this collection.

Indeed a somewhat similar religious view of all culture and civilization was propounded later by T.S. Eliot and Professor Toynbee both of whom stressed the Christian foundations of European culture in some detail.[2] We may presume that they were in some measure influenced by Coomaraswamy's arguments that European art like Hindu

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art was very much based on religion and that the secularized art and culture of modern Europe and America was a regretable deviation. This movement of rediscovery of the religious roots of art and culture in India and the West needs some careful sociological study of which my correlation of Indian middle class resurgence with revivalism is a small part.

Religious roots need rediscovery after they are covered over by secular overgrowth. At the same time it is equally important to investigate and understand the causes of the overgrowth itself. The secularization of Western society as a whole from the 18th century onwards has been studied from different angles piecemeal by different thinkers including Karl Marx and Max Weber. The secularization of art starting with painting has been discussed too but I am not aware of any comprehensive macro-study of Western secularization of artistic themes. How far did Protestantism contribute to it by denigrating an artistic mediatory church and leaving the individual alone to face his conscience and God—and the artist to face his human connoisseur. How much did urbanization, industry and mass society promote it? These and other related questions need continuous investigation and this needs frequent comparisons not only with Hindu India but with Islamic and Far Eastern Societies.

The influence of Islam on Hindu art reveals a degree of polarization which is still with us. Fiercely iconoclastic, it turned its face away from sculpture, the Hindu forte[3] and concentrated on architecture and abstract geometrical decoration which had some influence on Hindu plastic arts. But in the performing arts, it had few specific prohibitions or preferences. Outside of strict religious obligations such as Nimaz or Zakat, sensuousness in life and love was not anti-Islamic. Hence the efflorescence of secular romantic poetry and lighter forms of music based thereupon such as Ghazal and Thumri. At the same time the loves of Radha and Krishna could come back into music and dance when the ruling Muslim power was weak, lax and dependent on a Hindu majority as in Oudh—and this generated a crop of

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Muslim musicians singing songs on Krishna. At the same time the sensuous associations of the performing arts led to some loss of social standing for the artists which a reformer like Vishnu Digambar sought to restore early in this century through a closer reassociation of music with Bhakti.[4] This dialectical development from Tansen to Digambar needs careful socio-historical study.

We may also pose the question as to why Chinese and Japanese painting, drama and ballet have been predominently secular in the same comparative context. As we widen the scope of this comparison, the investigation becomes presently bewildering and potentially enriching. One way in which such an inquiry is made easy and even meaningless is by circular definitions of the artistic and the spiritual—equating one with the other. Indeed quite a bit of erudite writing on this question does not spurn this method altogether.

A more promising mode of comparative enquiry can be based on distinguishing between two different approaches to religion at two ends of continuum, namely the Hebraic and the Hindu. The former makes an ultra-sharp distinction between the unapproachable God in Heaven and the day to day world while the latter has a tendency to see God in everything and everything in God. In the case of the former, representational art such as sculpture, painting, drama and ballet are automatically kept out of the religious realm and even music may be treated with suspicion. Under these conditions, art expression is faced with three alternatives namely, total secularization of all art or cultivation of only formless abstract art namely music or large scale philistinization of society. Indeed these three alternatives have been followed singly and in combination in Hebraic, Islamic or Puritan societies. In contrast, the Hindu approach has permitted :

(*a*) Introducing all secular and sensuous elements into religious practices

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(*b*) investing all such secular practices with a religious aura outside the religious realm, and

(*c*) transforming a secular emotion or phenomenon into a religious one or the converse. We have given illustrations of all these in Indian art history—all of which obfuscate any distinction between the secular and the sacred, particularly in art.

I have tried to show the limits of the validity of Coomaraswamy's approach and the need for a more daring socio-historical analysis. I have already mentioned the undesirable unanticipated consequences of the former in the West as well as in India. Quite apart from absurd and degraded manifestations of Hindu cultist spiritually in the West, there is a persistent tendency to label Indian music and dance as religious—as improvisation or whatever and avoid all serious effort to understand the art as such. In India, too, the umbrella of Bhakti is often used in discussion to keep out the sunlight of analysis and criticism. Coomaraswamy cannot be blamed directly for all that but he must at least bear a part of the blame indirectly. In his own life time, he witnessed the proliferation of cheap litho-printed reproductions of religious subjects on the one hand[5] and the rise of the serious secular painting schools of Amrita Shergill and her successors.

In short we have reached a stage of confidence in which we can be profoundly grateful to, and pitilessly critical of, the great Mentor. We need not take refuge behind high spirituality to impress the West and indeed we need not seek to impress the West at all. Nor need we pay the compliment of taking seriously the arrogantly ignorant pronouncements of Western critics now mostly forgotten. In all the arts, we can confront ourselves with no apologies and look the West in the eye. That perhaps is the best tribute to the Kalayogi.

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Footnotes

1. V. Subramaniam, *Cultural Integration in India*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, Appendix I for a full discussion of middle class revivalism.

2. A.J. Toynbee, *Study of History*, last volume entitled Retractations; T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., New York, 1949.

3. It needs to be said over and over again that the volume of Hindu sculpture (including South East Asian temples) is more than the total volume of sculpture of all other world civilizations.

4. Music and dance particularly in U.P. were associated with cheap pleasure. Vishnu Digambar is credited with upgrading the status of these arts round the turn of the century.

5. Coomaraswamy was ruthlessly critical of Ravi Varma's paintings and litho reproductions. What he might have said about the later calendar artists of Bombay —boggles one's imagination.

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Professor V. Subramaniam was educated in Madras and took his doctorate at the Australian National University, Canberra. Since then he has taught Political Science in various universities in all the five continents and trained over 600 of India's Class I officers at the National Academy of Administration. He has won two Haldane Essay Prizes of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, London, in 1956 and 1957 and held the distinguished Simon Senior Fellowship of Manchester University in 1960 61. He has also been a Senior boursier of the French Government in 1970 and visiting professor at Heidelberg University and the German Civil Service Academy in 1977. He is at present a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

His fields of interest are Comparative Administration, Administrative Theory, Study of Elites and Cultural Sociology. He has published over forty articles in well known academic journals such as, **Public Administration** (Royal Institute of Public Administration, London), **Public Administration** (Sydney), **Public Administration Review** (Washington), **American Political Science Review** (Berkeley, California), **Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies** (London) and **The Indian Journal of Public Administration** (New Delhi). His two elite studies namely **The Social Background of India's Administrators**, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1971 and **The Managerial Class of India**, All India Management Association, New Delhi, 1971, were highly commended by reviewers in academic journals. He is also the author of pioneering socio historical analysis of the spread of British administrative ideas in his book Transplanted India British Administration.

Professor V. Subramaniam is a classical composer of acknowledged merit and recently (September 2nd, 1975) published a book of five dance dramas in Sanskrit entitled **Pancha Kanya Jarangini**—on five women who played a role in Budha's life. They have been choreographed and staged by top dancers in India and America.

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